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Goemulgaw Lagal: Cultural and Natural Histories of the Island of Mabuyag, Torres Strait

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COVER

Image on book cover: Pearlshelling station at Panay, Mabuyag, 1890s. Photographer unknown
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Marine industries and Mabuyag, 1870-1980

Anna SHNUKAL

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Pearling and other marine industries became the economic mainstay of post-contact Torres Strait and a catalyst for profound social and political changes. Mabuyag Islanders were already employed as pearlshell 'swimming divers' by 1872, when the first pearling stations were established on the island. This chapter¹ outlines the participation of Mabuyag Islanders in the marine industries to the late 1970s. It briefly examines the contest between shellers and missionaries for control over the Islanders; the workings of the shelling stations; the effects of the downturn of 1905; government policy and the 'company' boat system; and the effects of the 1936 strike.

□ *Pearling, marine industries, Mabuyag (Jervis Island)*

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From the beginning of the pearlrush in 1870, the Torres Strait regional economy has depended almost entirely on the produce of its waters. Its marine industries attracted thousands of foreign seamen who, along with Christian missionaries and British colonial authorities, profoundly influenced every facet of the Islanders' traditional society, cultural expression, economy and politics. The bêche-de-mer, pearlshell, trochus shell and cultured pearl fisheries also set in train significant internal migrations, as men and women sought employment far from their home islands, where they sometimes settled to raise families. The mixing of Islander crews from different islands on board the boats also led to greater camaraderie, political solidarity and (particularly after World War II) intermarriage than ever before and to the spread of the regional *lingua franca*, Torres Strait Creole.

Pearlshelling, like most primary production, is volatile, commercially precarious and subject to cycles of boom and bust. Ganter's (1994: 248-253) analysis of productivity statistics in the Torres Strait fishery between 1890 and 1940 identifies three major resource crises: 1898-1905; 1913-1914; and 1930-1932. Returns to producers depended on prices determined in overseas markets by foreign buyers calibrating future (i.e. uncertain) world supply and demand. Supply depended on the cost and availability of capital and cheap labour, new technologies, state and federal legislation, over-fishing and the discovery of new beds; demand fluctuated according to depressions, wars and, finally, the impact of cheaper plastic substitutes. Moreover, producers were generally reluctant to pool resources and act collectively even in their own best interests. The Queensland industry ebbed and flowed through the profit-taking late 1870s, late 1890s, late 1910s (post World War I), late 1920s, late 1930s and mid-1940s to mid-1950s; through the departure of the

fleets to Western Australia from 1886-1889, briefly to the Louisiade Archipelago in 1887 and for various lengths of time to the Aru Islands from 1905; through the loss-making early 1880s, early 1890s, mid-1900s, World War I, early 1920s and the depression of the 1930s; through cessation during World War II; and through terminal decline from the late 1950s to the collapse of the world market for shell by the end of 1962. Six commissions investigated the Queensland marine industries and their reports (Mackay, 1897, 1908; Dashwood, 1902; Bamford, 1913, 1916; Coombs, c.1946) are of particular interest for their terms of reference, recommendations and evidence taken.

1870-1889

Within two years of the beginning of the pearlrush in early 1870, onshore stations were established at Mabuyag, which was first visited by shellers at the end of that year. Henry Marjoribanks Chester, as Police Magistrate at Somerset on Cape York Peninsula, made the first official visit to the island in August 1871. Impressed by the people, he collected a short vocabulary of their language and listed the names of all 114 males, unfortunately lost. It is worth quoting his report at length, since it is the first lengthy account we have of the Mabuyag Islanders:

The boats of the *Pakeha* and *Melanie* were the first to call there and obtained a quantity of pearl and tortoise-shell... On arriving at the island I ran the boat into a small bay on the N.E. side where I found no less than fifteen canoes hauled up on the mud and a crowd of men on the rocks. An interpreter from Cape York explained to them the reason of our visit and warned them that not more than one canoe would be allowed alongside at a time. With

some little difficulty, due to the stupidity of the interpreter, they were made to understand that the price of a tomahawk or small knife was 10 pair of shells; of a large knife 15 pair; while three would purchase a fig of tobacco, and five pair a piece of iron for a fish spear. When the first tomahawk was handed out, it was exhibited in triumph to the people on shore who set up a great shout and sent off in haste for the shell stowed away in their huts. Amidst much laughter, scraping of hands and incessant shouts of 'Marbiack laag - laag!' the trading went briskly on, and in a very short time I had purchased 200 pair of shell. At first all the usual precautions adopted when trading with savages were observed, one man covering me with his carbine while I was stooping over the trade box, but before long the arms were laid aside and all hands were busy receiving and stowing away the shell.

Neither then, nor afterwards during my whole intercourse with them, was there the least attempt to extort more than the stipulated price; indeed, some weeks later when a dearth of tomahawks was impending, and I raised the price to 15 pair of shells, there was no dissatisfaction expressed. By this time mutual confidence had been established, and two of the tribe volunteered to go with me to Mulgrave island [Badu], and were away in the boat for three days. On returning to Marbiack I went on shore and was received by some 30 or 40 men of the tribe. From much whispered consultation in which the words 'Ipikagee' and 'laag nino laag' were frequently repeated, I gathered

that they were debating as to whether the women should be sent for, and the matter was apparently decided by my two friends vouching for our peaceful intentions.² A present of beads distributed among the women and children who then came forward from the mangroves, behind which they watched over proceedings, was received with much rejoicing, and, what is rare among savages, there was no begging for more. In five subsequent visits to these people in each of which I spent a week at the island I never had reason to alter the very favorable opinion I formed of them during our first intercourse. Such confidence had they that two of their principal men on one occasion returned with me to Cape York, and seven on another. The latter were detained longer than was expected as I had to take some natives who had been cast away in a canoe back to their own island, so that it was three weeks before the Marbiack men could get home. The joy at their return was great; nearly the whole population of the island flocked down to the beach and crowded into and around the boat. Their wives brought their youngest children and placed them in the arms of the men, who fondled them in the boat while relating the wonders they had seen. What appeared to have struck them most during their stay was the shooting of a bullock, for though they had most likely heard of the effects of firearms, they had evidently never witnessed their power, and could not understand how so large a beast could be so easily killed...

A physiognomist would probably form a low estimate of the character

of the Gamaleega [Goemulgal] from the low type of countenance so frequently met with in which cunning and cruelty are strongly depicted; but as regards affection for their children, intelligence and energy, which latter quality was to me their principal recommendation, they far surpass all other natives of the Strait with whom I have come in contact. They have never yet been known to take part in any of the massacres of whites, but the very qualities which distinguish them from other natives would render them all the more formidable if provoked, as recent events have shown (Chester, 1871).

Late that year Somerset Police Magistrate Frank Jardine received a report that Colin Thompson, mate of the *Margaret and Jane*, had shot two Mabuyag men, 'Nukis' [Ngukis] and 'Edowah', who had been on board a canoe full of Mabuyag Islanders 'making their escape from the Schooner, where they had been employed as divers'.³ Chester investigated and reported that Thompson had fired indiscriminately on the men; consequently

the confident and fearless demeanor which formerly characterised the Marbiack people has given place to a cowed and sullen manner, and now instead of gathering on the beach to welcome a boats arrival, they make off with all their property into the scrub so soon as one heaves in sight (Jardine, 1872).⁴

The Rev. William Wyatt Gill of the London Missionary Society (LMS) visited Mabuyag in October 1872 and remarked that despite a few cocoa-palms it was barren: the people were all engaged in pearl-diving and neglecting their gardens. A shelling station, managed by George Mortimer Pearson, had

been established a short time previously at Panay, the easternmost point of Mabuyag.⁵ It is likely that Pearson's house was located nearby at Dabangay as Gill (1874: 219) made the following observation which relates to this village site: 'a devil-tree, or ancient banyan, with large shells and dugong bones growing into its trunk or suspended by rope-like tendrils from lofty branches. Here was supposed to be the home of a mighty spirit, whose favour it was desirable to propitiate by offerings. Under one side of this immense tree is built the house of the shelling master' (Figure 1).



FIG. 1. 'Devil-tree on Jervis' Island', Dabangay (from Gill, 1876: 203).

By November 1872 Captain Gray also had a station at Panay and the Somerset log records his visits and those of his offsider, Owen Owens, to Somerset in the schooner, *Mary Ann Christina*, and her two boats (Gill, 1876: 201; Powell, 1871-1876, entries for 29 November 1872, 11 February 1873, 6 March 1873, 22 April 1873, 23 April 1873, 7 June 1873, 23 August 1873, 10 September 1873). Thus, Panay is important not only ethnologically,

as the headquarters of the Dugong-Crocodile clan, but also historically as the site of one of the few operating pearling stations in the Strait, which operated almost continuously for some 40 years, from 1872 to 1890 and again from 1914 to at least 1935, possibly until the early 1940s.

At the beginning of the 1873 pearling season, swim divers from islands within 60 miles of Queensland, including Mabuyag, were increasingly being employed; they were paid not less than £6 per annum, entered formally on ships' articles and discharged before the Shipping Master at Somerset (Jardine, 1873) (Figure 2). Mabuyag, 'the natural base for swimming stations, as the shallow and reef-strewn waters adjacent to it cover an extensive area' (Mackenzie, 1918: 60), hosted three stations by March

1873: one owned by the Sydney firm of John Bell (managed by Pearson); one by Messrs Merriman, also of Sydney, which had its principal station on Tudu (Warrior Island); and the third by another Sydney firm, Messrs Towns and Burns, with its principal station at Gebar (Two Brothers Island or Brothers Island) (Moresby, 1873). In 1873 Captain John Moresby in H.M.S. *Basilisk* toured Torres Strait to report on contraventions of the newly-passed British Imperial *Pacific Islanders Protection Act* 1872 (popularly known as the 'Kidnapping Act') and reported on the stations at Mabuyag:

With reference to Messrs Bell: until last November their station was worked by the schooner *Mary Ann Christina* with 22 natives brought from the Loyalty and New Hebrides Groups. On the

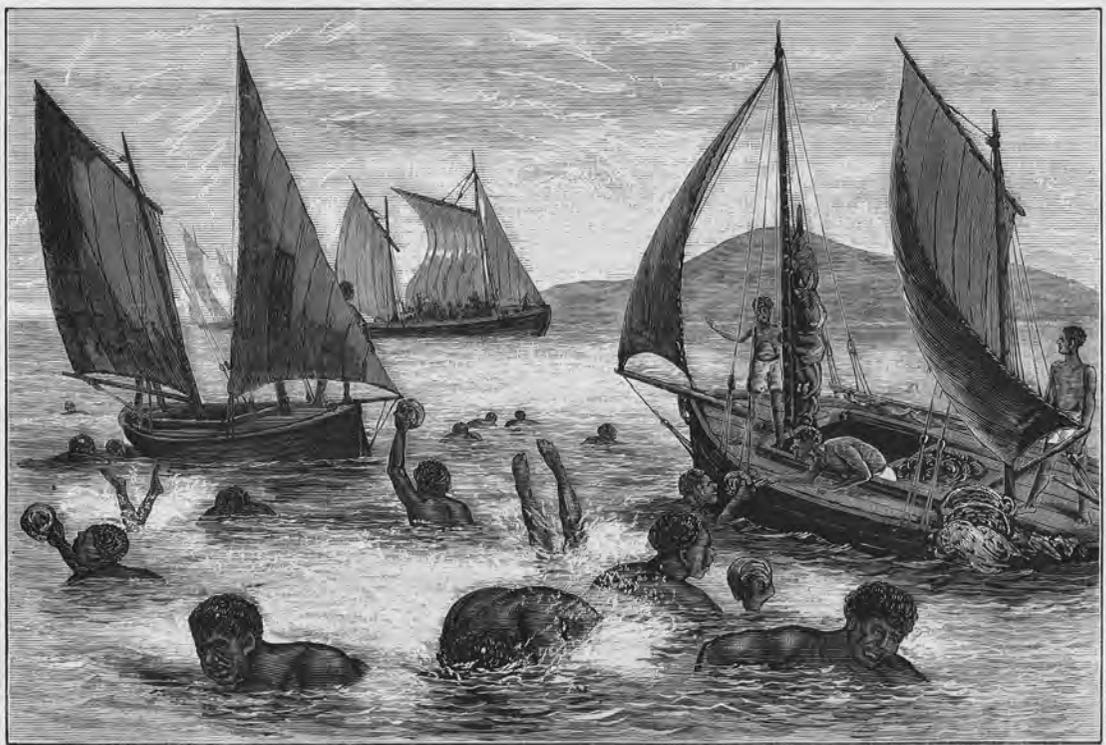


FIG. 2. Pearlshelling in Torres Strait using free-swimming divers with Badu in the distance (from *Australasian Sketcher* 1876, 15 April, pp. 6, 13).

22nd of last November the South Sea Islanders were all reshipped, and the *Mary Ann Christina* sailed for Sydney, leaving behind the following property, which I have found here.

3 large open pearl shelling boats with gear complete

1 roomy hut on shore

¼ ton of pearl shell

A quantity of trade and provisions; the whole being in charge of a white man "Owen Owens" who has in conjunction with the masters of the *Mary Ann Christina* entered into an agreement with 18 natives of this (Jervis) island to supply them with a trifling remuneration of food and trade if they will fish for pearl shell in the boats: this the natives are most willing to do.

With reference to Messrs Merriman, their property on the island is as follows:

3 large open pearl shelling boats, partly dismantled

½ ton of pearl shell

1 large hut on shore

A small quantity of provision, the whole being in charge of John Otago, a Brazilian subject. Until a recent period (3 weeks) the natives of Warrior Id were working under this man pearl shelling but a disagreement having occurred between them the Warrior Id natives left and returned to their own island and he has at present no one working for him.

With reference to Messrs Towns and Burns, their property on the island is as follows:

The 6 ton cutter *Fanny*, nearly worn out, no sails bent and no crew:

1 pearl shelling boat 1 dinghy

1 hut on shore

A small quantity of provisions. Two Polynesians, natives of Rara Tonga, are in charge of the above, but under the superintendence of Albert Collins at the Brothers Island.⁶ These Polynesians having been many years in English whalers, intelligent men speaking good English, I have regarded them as English subjects (Moresby, 1873).

Moresby made a distinction between the pearl shell fisheries

carried on by natives deported from distant South Sea islands and the same fisheries carried on by the Torres Straits Islanders themselves. I am of opinion that whilst the former is liable to too many abuses to be permitted the latter should be encouraged in every possible way.

The Torres Straits Islanders have a perfectly friendly feeling towards white men, and live at peace with each other – their great desire is to get pearl shellers to settle in their islands in order that they may obtain axes, tobacco etc. etc. which are daily becoming a greater necessity to them.

They willingly engage themselves to fish on the reefs. I should deem it therefore a most unwise proceeding to prevent, or throw difficulties in the way of enterprising men carrying on these valuable fisheries by means of the local Islanders (Moresby, 1873).

He urged Jardine 'to grant such temporary licences as his powers permitted, for the employment of Torres Straits natives', which 'after some difficulty he did' (Moresby, 1876: 232-3). The missionaries, who had other plans for the Islanders, were incensed. Mabuyag, with its central position and safe anchorage, was the Rev. Archibald Wright

Murray's preferred site for the headquarters of the Papuan mission but it had become 'one of the principal resorts of the pearl shell seekers' and 'almost if not all the able bodied men are in their employ during a great part of the year' (Murray, 1874: 33). The people were neglecting their gardens and becoming dependent on the European food provided by the shellers, not only to their Torres Strait 'swimming' divers, both male and female, but also their families, including the older people (Murray, 1873).

The missionaries generally despised the shellers on moral grounds – supplying alcohol to their workers, ignoring abuses, not observing the Sabbath, living with Indigenous women – and competed with them for the Islanders' allegiance. Fulminating about the situation on Mabuyag the Rev. Samuel McFarlane of the LMS wrote that it had become 'the rendezvous of all the immoral filth of the Straits' and that all the Islanders were 'shamefully demoralised': 'The captains of the three stations employ upward of two hundred natives from the South Sea islands and the Straits. Quite a fleet of boats return from the reefs every Saturday evening, and then there is drinking and dancing and all sorts of immorality carried on till Monday morning' (McFarlane, 1874). One of the captains may have been Thomas G. Chapman, who, writes Ganter (1994: 246), moved his station to Mabuyag in 1873 after harassment from the colonial authorities. Chapman, however, is not mentioned as working from Mabuyag by Police Magistrate Christopher D'Oyly Hay Aplin, who visited the pearling fields in late 1874 and found only two stations there: James Merriman, managed by W.R. Ware, with 24 employees,⁷ and John Bell, managed by Pearson, with 75 employees (Aplin, 1875a); this was also the case in 1876 (McFarlane, 1876).

In January 1875, Owen Owens, who was then in charge of Bell's station, and an unnamed

Mabuyag employee, were accidentally killed. According to two Mabuyag men (also unnamed) who witnessed the incident,

Owens who was partly intoxicated, went in that evening with the other Jervis Island native to draw a bottle of rum from a cask and in doing so held the naked flame of a Kerosine [sic] lamp close to the spill hole when an explosion took place killing the native instantly ... Owens was knocked down by the explosion but got up and staggered out of the Store telling the Natives to throw water on the fire. He died the next morning [4 January 1875] and was buried there (Aplin, 1875b).⁸

The missionaries continued to rail against the shellers: the boats were coming into Mabuyag at all hours of the day or night, exchanging their shell for provisions and firewood and sailing away on the Sabbath, a day the missionaries had decreed should be work-free (McFarlane, 1875). The island was also a stopover for boats from Tudu and Gebar on their way to Somerset and a staging post for journeys to the islands to its north and the New Guinea coast. On 1 December 1877, not long after supervising the Somerset settlement's removal to Thursday Island, Chester sailed to Mabuyag to meet a party of men who were to join him in exploring the Mai Kussa (Baxter) river in New Guinea.⁹ They left two days later, accompanied by one of Pearson's men to pilot them across the Orman Reef; Pearson 'also induced Mamoose, the chief of the Marbiak tribe [probably Ganaia], to go with us as interpreter for Talbot Island [Boigu]' (Chester, 1878). By then, the missionaries were beginning to make small gains in winning the Islanders away from the shellers and in mid-1878, despite most of the population being still employed by the three pearling stations, many were refusing to reengage, building houses near the mission

premises and attending school regularly (McFarlane, 1878).

At the end of the 1878 pearling season Joseph Tucker had established a station on Mabuyag with six vessels, three Europeans and 41 non-Europeans. This was in addition to the two already there: John Bell, still managed by Pearson, with nine vessels, three Europeans and 57 non-Europeans; and Merriman, with six vessels, one European and 33 non-Europeans (i.e. Islanders from Torres Strait and the Pacific and mainland Aborigines) (Figure 3).

Reporting on the pearlshell fisheries in September 1879, Thomas de Hoghton of HMS *Beagle* found Bell's station still at Mabuyag, now operating 10 boats and two tenders, with Albert Collis managing Merriman's station. We also have descriptions of the stations at Mabuyag during 1879 from two anonymous visitors (Anon., 1879; Anon., 1880a, 1880b). The most substantial and permanent station was still Bell's, 'one of the largest in the Straits, employing 15 boats (diving and swimming) and about 130 or 140 men, whose wages average from £6 a year [for swimming divers] to £200 or £250 [for marine divers]' (Anon., 1880a). Its buildings faced the beach

to catch 'the cool south-easterly trades which blow the greater part of the year'; there was a flourishing vegetable garden, 'a well-kept hospital, and a good supply of medicines' (Anon., 1879). The visitor observed men 'engaged at a host of occupations – some mending sails, others carpentering, some reeving ropes in blocks and binding them, and altogether fully employed, presenting a lively picture of industry' (Anon., 1880a). By contrast, Tucker's subsidiary station, unlike his primary station at Goode Island, employed only swimming divers, who were supervised by a resident overseer. It consisted 'of a collection of good grass huts, in which the employees – nearly all natives of the island or immediately adjacent ones – reside, a shell-house, and store'. Such stations incurred comparatively little expense: building material grew on the island, the cost for labour was minimal with annual wages for each worker being £6 worth of a trade goods – mostly 'tobacco and calico, with an occasional knife and gaudy handkerchief' – and only a moderate outlay on foodstuffs. Within half a mile of Tucker's station and between it and Bell's station was 'a branch station' of Mr Merriman, managed by Collis. 'A much more pretentious residence

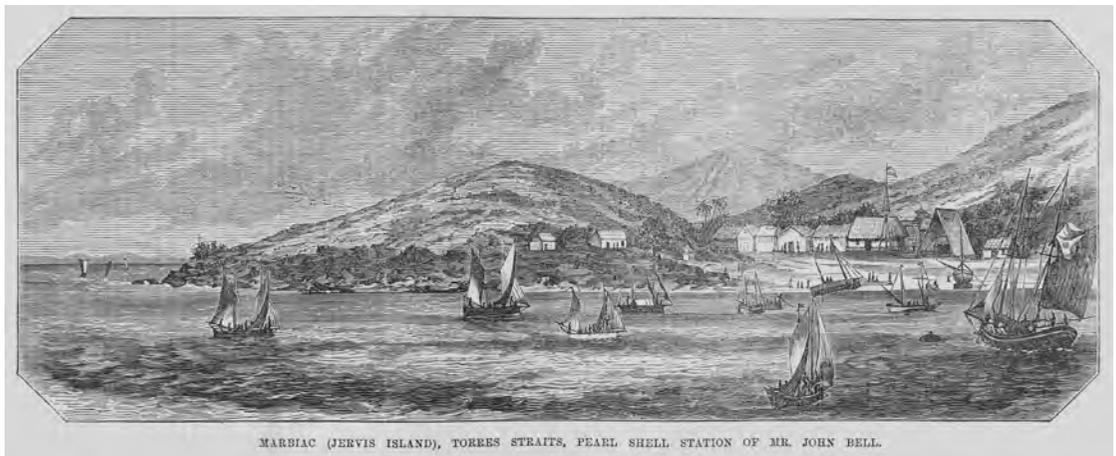


FIG. 3. John Bell's pearlshelling station at Panay, Mabuyag. (from *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 26 July 1879, p. 168) (Source: National Library of Australia, Canberra).

is here erected, in which the latter dwells, and around it, in picturesque confusion, are scattered the various huts of the workmen' (Anon., 1880a.). The only other firm working from Mabuyag at the time was that of Captain Cadell, managed by J. Mogg. 'A small schooner, which was anchored opposite Bell's station, served Mr Mogg as a station, and he employed about 50 hands; having two boats, one marine diving and the other swimming' (Anon., 1880b). Moodie Munro and Summers may have taken over Tucker's station in late 1879, employing Aboriginal people from the Jardine River district (Chester, 1879a, 1879b; Ganter, 1994: 247). To save costs, several firms had amalgamated but all except one firm were Sydney-based:

the boats are built there, all stores are received from there, all the shell is sent there for sale, and Sydney is the place where nearly all the divers go to when paid off, and there they re-engage again; and beyond fishing in the Queensland waters and paying taxes to the Queensland Government, no communication appears to be held with that colony (de Hoghton, 1879: 1163).

On 10 December 1879 Captain Charles Pennefather of the QGS *Pearl* anchored at Mabuyag. He was tasked with informing the Islanders that their land had been annexed to Queensland by the Crown and they would henceforth be subject to the laws of the colonial government. He found three stations in operation, two of which (Bell and Merriman) had been in occupation for some six years. He counted the population at 257, of whom 91 were employed by George Pearson, who had nine licensed boats, and 21 by Joseph Hastings in his two boats. Joseph Tucker had three boats but employed only one Mabuyag Islander (Pennefather, 1879a, entry for 10 December, 1879b). Another task was to investigate complaints made

by Pearson against the New Caledonian missionary teacher, Saneish (Shnukal, see paper on Christianity, this volume).

During the first decades of the pearlrush, the pearling stations, their managers and men remained in one place only so long as they continued to be commercially viable, moving rapidly to more lucrative fields across northern Australia and beyond and frequently changing owners. In mid-1880 only Bell's station (still managed by Pearson) was operating on Mabuyag with 10 boats and 105 employees, including 59 'Polynesians' and 43 'Aboriginals' but by mid-1882 there were several stations, employing over 200 'natives from all parts' (Chester, 1880; McFarlane, 1882a). Passage of the *Pearl Shell and Bêche de Mer Fishery Act* 1881 empowered the colonial government to issue licenses to occupy Crown land on various islands and evict squatters, generally Pacific Islanders discharged from the fisheries. In 1882 Chester recommended the lease of the southeast half of Mabuyag to George Pearson for a pearling station for a term of seven years at the generous annual rent of £10,¹⁰ since he 'employs nearly all the young men of the tribe, and supports the old people. The lessee applied for a lease in order that he might be better able to protect the natives from the Polynesians employed in the fishery, and does not interfere with native rights' (Chester, 1882c).¹¹ Pearson's station was located about three-quarters of a mile from the mission compound and a greater area was needed, he wrote, 'to form a cocoanut plantation and to grow vegetables for the use of station', then employing over 100 men. Pearson's Special Lease 155 was granted from 1 May 1882. It originally included the mission premises and the village but these were later excluded after protests from the LMS (Pearson, 1882a; Queensland Department of Lands, 1882).

Some idea of the general conditions that obtained in the early Mabuyag pearling

stations and the difficulty of the few resident Europeans to control their crews can be found in Chester's account of a drunken affray instigated by Christopher Scanlan, a Samoan diver, which occurred on Mabuyag on 23 January 1881:

On Sunday 23rd January a diver went to Mr Pearson's house and demanded a bottle of grog, and on being refused and ordered away he struck Mr Pearson, who promptly put him in irons. The man was rescued by force by about 50 Polynesians and had not Mr Jardine's manager and another European who happened to be there, gone to Pearson's assistance it is probable he would have been maltreated as the men were very violent and excited with liquor. Two other Europeans witnessed the affray, both managers of shelling stations, but would not interfere to preserve order!

The diver and the worst of the ringleaders were brought before me on 26th ulto [26 January] and were sentenced to two and three months with hard labor and I trust the example will have due effect.

The above is by no means a solitary instance, but the European managers are so entirely at the mercy of their divers that they very rarely venture to punish them for misconduct for fear that they will get less shell (Chester, 1881a).

Chester suggested that 'as a means of preserving order' on Mabuyag 'a couple of constables should be stationed there and a lock-up built, and that the expense of this necessary provision should fall upon the owners of stations'. Pearson may have treated his men decently but, on 23 October 1881, 29 Torres Strait Islanders deserted the

service of Joseph Tucker, who managed the other Mabuyag station, taking two of his boats to return to their homes. Most of the men gave themselves up and 'Smoke' and 'George' tendered a statement on 8 November, explaining their actions:

We run away because two men belonging to Moralug been killed along a shark. When man sick Tucker he no give him medicine, he make him work. He no give man *kiki [food] on Saturday and Sunday when we fellow no work. He give South Sea man every fortnight about 6 case grog. South Sea man he want to pull him out woman belonging to we fellow. We fellow stop bush because all South Sea man drunk (Chester, 1881b).

The case was heard on 10 November and Chester ordered that 'each man should forfeit one pound of his wages to compensate their employer for the loss he had sustained and the injury done to his boats'. They agreed to return to work, provided they were not compelled to dive where their countrymen were taken by sharks, but almost immediately seven of them again deserted. Chester considered that Tucker had brought the trouble on himself and refused to apply the penalties of the *Masters and Servants Act*, under which most of the men were then employed. Instead, he recommended to the Colonial Secretary that 'if shellers engage aboriginals it should be with the understanding that they do so at their own risk, and must not expect any assistance from the police to enforce a civil contract the binding nature of which is not understood by the natives'. Moreover, he added,

[i]f aboriginals enjoyed the same immunity from imprisonment as is extended to females under the "Master and Servants Act",

employers would have to rely more on good treatment to secure their services than on the penalties provided by the Act. When hungry these men will sign any agreement and repent as soon as their wants are satisfied. This being the case I have always refused to sign them for more than twelve months at a time and even that is too long as the turtle season is to them an irresistible temptation to desert (Chester, 1881b).

The known pearling beds were rapidly becoming exhausted when in early 1882 a new field was discovered. It extended some 50 km south of a point about 25 km west of Mabuyag and was estimated at about 30 km wide. During the first three months of 1882 it yielded 300 tons, only 100 tons less than for all of 1881. 'During April twelve boats are said to have obtained 30 tons in a fortnight, and three boats of another firm got 5 tons in the same time'. Only 11 shelling firms now remained after the amalgamation of several smaller operations. Costs were increasing: an average diving boat could cost almost £400 after freight, insurance and gear were included. Then there were ongoing expenses of approximately £6 per month for a diver and a lay of £6 per ton (which might be doubled for a first class diver); £3 per month £3 per ton for the tender; and £2 per month each for four pump hands. Added to that was the cost of rations (about 1/6 per day per man): 'thus, reckoning the average catch for a single boat at one ton per month, valued £125 there is a balance of £100 less the lay of diver and tender, packing and freight, as the result of an average months work' (Chester, 1882b).

Only Bell's station at Panay, still managed by Pearson with nine boats and 40 Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal employees, was now operating from Mabuyag, although the island remained a rendezvous for the boats, which came in 'every alternative Saturday

to meet the tenders and fresh supplies'. Liquor was freely available and, as the only European, Pearson was also the only source of protection for the Islanders and consequently, he told authorities, often feared for his life. Nor could he count on support from the LMS missionary, Saneish, who, he said, promoted racial discord and undermined his control by encouraging both Pacific and Mabuyag Islanders to leave him and work for the mission. As a result of his complaints, Saneish was removed in early 1880.

Pacific Islanders bring out a lot of grog (which is either supplied to them by their employers or from the store at Thursday Island) and then invite all their countrymen to join them in a drunken spree, all of them getting mad drunk, and when in this state committing outrages on the natives of this island, beating the men (sometimes nearly to death) pulling down their huts, and carrying off the women either into their boats or to the bush and there committing a rape on them (Pearson, 1882b).¹²

In February 1882 Chester, acting on information from Pearson, issued a warrant for the arrest of three Pacific Islanders 'for assaulting the natives and destroying their property'. Two other managers of stations, who had also sustained losses, had also laid complaints. Legally, the provisions of the *Pacific Island Labourers Act* did not apply to men in the fisheries. Moreover, 'even if clause 42 was extended to include them it could be easily evaded by Malays and Chinese procuring the liquor and passing it on to the South Sea islanders' (Chester, 1882a).

Official correspondence does not name the three men involved in the affray but the Thursday Island Court of Petty Sessions (CPS) deposition and minute book records that they were Chris Scanlan, Charlie Fiji and

Can Can,¹³ all of whom pleaded not guilty to charges of assault and battery. Charlie Fiji's case was dismissed but Scanlan and Can Can were sentenced to four weeks imprisonment in Thursday Island gaol with hard labour. Evidence given in Pacific Pidgin English by three Mabuyag Islanders¹⁴ and Hëxen, the LMS teacher, was recorded as follows:

Dubbo, a native of Jervis Island called. My name Dubbo, I speak true. I savey Can Can. Tuesday night Can Can come fishing station. He come house belong to missionary at Marbiac, all we fellow sleep inside house. Can Can come inside house he fight dog. Same time he broke boat belonging to my grandfather. I tell the missionary. He Can Can comes strike me on the nose. He struck me again in the ear. My shirt and trousers full of blood. Can Can he drunk. It was night time all the man sleep. He no see Christie Scanlan or Charlie Fiji.

Mabua called states – My name is Mabua I belong Marbiack. I speak true. I savey this three fellow (pointing at prisoners). Sunday afternoon Chris (meaning Scanlan) hit me in the mouth, no other man hit me. He hit me one time for nothing. He drunk.

Karoon called states – My name Karoon. I belong to Marbiack. Yes I speak true. I know these three fellow (pointing to prisoners). One Sunday Can Can he come my place he drunk he fight me along bamboo. He hit my head. I don't know whats the matter that fellow he row for nothing. He come my place day time. He swell him my head.

Harkin called sworn states – My name Harkin [Hëxen] I belong Lifu. I am missionary teacher belonging to Marbiac. I savey these men (pointing

to prisoners). One Sunday the 19th February in the afternoon these three men drinking grog. I see Christie Scanlan fight Mabua. I see him hit Mabua. I no see Can Can fight any body nor Charlie Fiji. ...

Christie Scanlan states – I went round to the native camp on Sunday afternoon to get my fowl from there. The fowl ran amongst the native houses I turned back and never done nothing to them.

Can Can states – I don't know how the row begin on Sunday afternoon. I never hit the natives (Court of Petty Sessions, 1882).

Chester (1882d) pointed out that during bad weather up to 400 men might camp on Mabuyag and scenes of drunkenness and violence were common. 'The only European manager residing there is often unable to preserve order or protect the natives from drunken South Sea islanders.' He suggested that 'before owners of stations are allowed to use any inhabited island as a camping ground for their men they should be compelled to form an outstation there, and keep a European in charge as a check on their men', while keeping other boats away. Other uninhabited but watered islands close to the pearling fields might perhaps be used instead.

In June 1883 William Henry Dubbins was managing Bell's station at Panay, presumably during the brief interval between Pearson's departure and the arrival of Thomas Stubbs Brown, who gave evidence in August 1883 that he was 'part owner and manager' of the station. Stubbs became its 'managing owner' in January 1884, when Pearson's lease, boats (including the *Lord Loftus*) and station were officially transferred to him (Pearson, 1883; Court of Petty Sessions, 1883a, 1883b, 1884). Strachan (1888: 14) visited Mabuyag in April 1884 and 'was much pleased to see the care that Captain Brown had taken for the comfort

of his people. The houses were all built of galvanized iron and whitewashed, giving the station the appearance of a considerable village.' He learned from Brown that 'his station was one of the largest in the Straits, employing over one hundred men and twelve vessels, all busily and profitably employed in the pearl shelling.' Not much had changed, however, with respect to the provision of alcohol and subsequent assaults on local people. According to Thursday Island publican, Thomas McNulty (1883),

all the disturbances occurring here for last five years is entirely attributable to shellers supplying on their stations spirituous liquors to coloured men, which supply of course has been illegal. ... and in the early part of

this year a lot of coloured men sent to Cooktown for trial for offences committed against native women on the Island of Maback [Mabuyag] is also attributable to those men being supplied with spirituous liquors on Maback station.

John Douglas became Government Resident in July 1885 and shortly afterwards spent a few days at Mabuyag. Brown's 'very nice station' he wrote, consisted of 'a comfortable house nestling under pendulous palms and willows, with a stone pier, a work of some magnitude, and with all the appurtenances of marine stores, boats, cutters, and yachts - the "Lord Loftus" riding at anchor jauntily under the shelter of the pier' (Douglas, 1886: 76) (Figure 4; see also Herle *et al.*, this volume, Fig. 14).

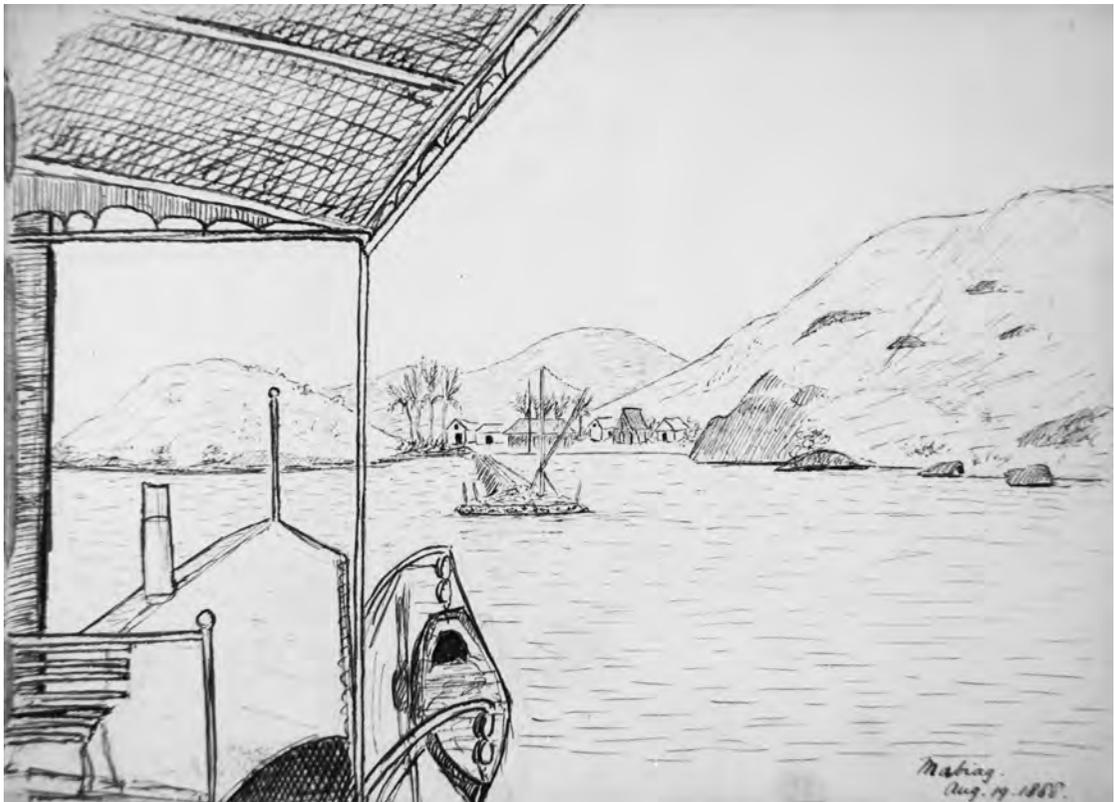


FIG. 4. Thomas Brown's pearling station at Panay sketched from the back of a boat by Alfred Haddon, 19 August 1888, looking southwest (CUMAA: 1033.Bk.1.19.8.1888).

1890-1904

Brown retired to Sydney in 1890 and gifted all his Mabuyag property to the LMS, including the jetty and various buildings at Panay (Savage, 1890). By then the houses were 'all falling to pieces' and the roofing iron was collected for future use (Chalmers, 1891). With the demolition of the Panay station, Mabuyag entered a new historical phase with a commercial association between the LMS and the marine industries. Although the story of Papuan Industries Ltd (PIL) properly belongs to Badu, the idea was given embryonic form on Mabuyag, when in about 1895 the LMS missionary, Frederick William Walker, helped the Islanders to purchase a lugger, *Little Nell*, their first cooperatively-owned boat (Douglas, 1895: 6). Walker later left the society to establish PIL as a limited company to encourage the Islanders to participate in the marine industries as boat owners, captains and crews. PIL lent the purchase price to enable each island to buy a 'company' (cooperative or communally-owned) boat, charging 5% interest and arranging the sale of marine produce and cultural artefacts in exchange (Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals [hereafter Annual Report], 1934: 18). Ganter (1994: 61) points out that this allowed the Islanders 'flexible subsistence and cash production as an alternative to the commercial fishery based at Thursday Island' and 'exploited resource areas over which the owners had traditional rights and therefore a certain responsibility for resource conservation'. 'Master boats', by contrast, were owned by European 'master pearlery', who hired Islanders mainly as crew (Ganter, 1994: 255).

By mid-1895 the Mabuyag men, who worked their lugger 'on a kind of cooperative principle', had paid off two-thirds of the purchase price and all payments were completed by the middle of 1896 (Chalmers,

1898). The government resident strongly supported the venture as a means of bringing the Islanders into the industrial economy (Douglas, 1895: 6). He credited Walker with teaching the Mabuyag men

how to co-operate and work together in such a way that they could buy their own luggers. There had been attempts to buy luggers on previous occasions, but they failed, to a certain extent because when they had worked off a certain proportion of the price they got tired; and as they did not pay up, the persons from whom they had bought came down and took possession again (Douglas, 1900a: 33).

The main shellers and traders headquartered on Mabuyag during this period were John Cowling and James Doyle. Cowling managed the Mobiag (also spelled Maubuiag, Mobyag) Pearlery and Trading Company, which set up operations in 1896. Both he and Doyle, of Doyle Marden and Company, lived with their wives on the island and built well-appointed stores which catered for residents of the outer islands (Douglas, 1900b) (Figures 5-8). Cowling's house was on top of Panay Pad (Panay Hill) but only an old stone well and stone-lined paths remain today (Teske, 1986: 8);¹⁵ his store was at the most easterly point near the little harbour and jetty (Haddon, 1901: 118). In 1899, Cowling and Doyle set out the problems of 'small' shellers, i.e., shellers with shore stations, employing Indigenous swimming divers for a maximum of six months at 10/- per month (though the actual costs might be three or four times that amount) and paying £5 annually for every shore station (although they had no permanent rights to the land and might be required to vacate at any time). They also complained about the lack of uniformity of the various acts under which they worked and other costs they considered



FIG. 5. Pearlshelling station facilities at Panay and shared by John Cowling and James Doyle. This photograph was published in *The Queenslander*, 26 June 1897, p. 31. The copy of the photograph reproduced here forms part of the Haddon photographic collection at Cambridge University (CUMAA: N23274.ACH2).



FIG. 6. Pearlshelling station facilities at Panay and shared by John Cowling and James Doyle (Cairns Historical Society: P01516).



FIG. 7. 'The shell house at Mobyag' located at Panay and shared by John Cowling and James Doyle (from *The Queenslander*, 26 June 1897, p. 31). (Source: John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland).



FIG. 8. Panay showing the extant nineteenth century rock-walled jetty, 31 October 2010 (Photo: Ian J. McNiven).

excessive, such as the licence fee of £3 per annum for each small cutter engaged in swimming diving (Doyle *et al.*, 1899).

Doyle's fleet worked the Orman Reef and the waters between Mabuyag and Dauan and, according to Canon Sagi Ambar (pers. comm., 1982), both men employed divers and crews from Mabuyag, Mer (Murray Island) and the Top Western Islands, as well as Aboriginal people and Pacific Islanders: one of Doyle's lugger skippers was the Samoan Tipoti Nona; James Mills, also from Samoa, sold his shell to Doyle; and Jack Tanna, from Vanuatu, worked for both Cowling and Doyle (Frith, n.d.; Mills, 1915; Schomberg, 1929).

For about a decade the two shellers profited from the high price of shell, the labour and enterprise of the Islanders and their growing desire for manufactured goods. By mid-1897 the Little Nell was paid off and the Mabuyag Islanders had a choice of two stores in which to 'sell their shell on the spot for nearly its full value. The condition of the people is in one sense much improved. Their right to fish in their own waters has so far been recognised that they are not required to pay for licenses for their boats' (Douglas, 1897: 5). The authorities' chief concern was that, although the Islanders made good profits, they saved very little (Douglas, 1898: 5).

By 1902 there were apparently 'a number of Europeans', apart from Cowling and Doyle, living on Mabuyag (Burne, 1902); one of them was I. Hackett Parke (Doyle *et al.*, 1899); another was Oscar Edward Blackman (Electoral Officer, 1902). If they behaved themselves, they do not appear in official correspondence. Douglas was determined to expel all foreigners who disturbed island peace. He stated his policy when Doyle threatened the Samoan resident, George Hankin, with expulsion from Mabuyag:

if Hankin broke the law, and committed offences which might

render it desirable that he should leave the Island I might require him to do so, but not otherwise, and not until he had been convicted of offences which would justify such action (Douglas, 1903a).

On the other hand, when in December 1902 the Samoan carpenter, Peter Bee, pleaded guilty to unlawfully creating a disturbance at Mabuyag, Douglas discharged him on the condition that he not return to the island (Court of Petty Sessions, 1902).

Unsatisfactory European residents like Doyle, who had a license to occupy five acres of Mabuyag, were more difficult to dislodge. Both Cowling and Doyle were made Justices of the Peace and both interfered to some extent in local affairs for their own benefit but Doyle was notorious for his abuse of the office and his crew: O'Brien (1905a) reported that he supplied alcohol to the Islanders, had sexual relations with their women and perverted local governance but, '[o]wing to the almost insurmountable difficulties in the way of prosecuting such an offender, it had heretofore been found impossible to commence a prosecution with a prospect of success' (Annual Report, 1905: 28). Such was the hostility towards Doyle that some of the Islanders stated 'that they would rather leave the Island if [he] were allowed to remain on it'. Douglas was reluctant to cancel Doyle's occupation license, 'unless it was proved to my satisfaction that you [Doyle] had behaved in a tyrannical or unlawful way to the inhabitants of the Island. In that case I said that I would recommend that your license should not be renewed.' He did, however, require Doyle to resign as a JP (Douglas, 1903b). Despite several official recommendations to cancel Doyle's permits to employ Indigenous labour, along with his occupation license on Mabuyag, the authorities were reluctant to act, apparently because of the difficulty of obtaining evidence that would secure a conviction according to law:

It is very aggravating, knowing all that the man is doing, that we cannot get a conviction against him. He has the natives thoroughly impressed with the idea that the Government cannot touch him and that they must obey him (Roth, 1903; Douglas, 1903b; O'Brien, 1905a, 1905b).

1905-1935

The year 1905 saw the end of a reasonably profitable period. Prices had been softening for a few years but by the end of 1904 the fall from over £300 to below £100 per ton forced the major pearling fleets to abandon the strait (Annual Report, 1905: 28). According to Riley (1904), this was due 'partly to the Americans being able to send a smaller and inferior shell to England and sell at £10 per ton and partly to the war in the East'. Four shore stations, including those managed by Cowling and Doyle at Mabuyag, and another two at Badu, ceased operations early in 1905, leaving 115 men without employment, many of them Torres Straits Islanders. As a consequence, most of the Europeans left Mabuyag, as did many Pacific Islanders without local ties. Doyle's permits and occupation license were cancelled in early 1906 by Chief Protector Roth (1906a, 1906b) and the government purchased his dwelling house, store and cottage, 'together with the tanks, stove, galvanised iron and all fittings' for £40. In mid-July the government carpenter dismantled the cottage, 'taking the stumps on with him to Saibai where he put them under the teacher's residence' (O'Brien, 1906a). This left the teacher, Andrew Struthers Cairns, and his family as the only resident Europeans (Cairns, 1906: 11; O'Brien, 1906b). To add to the Islanders' misfortune the gardens failed during the last few months of 1905 after an abnormally short kuki (monsoon) season and inadequate early

rains (Cairns, 1905: 12). They had purchased two more cutters from a local Japanese firm in 1904 and did well to pay off the full purchase price of £177 each for the two cutters, *Mabuiag* and *Uropi*, in October 1906 (Cairns, 1904: 12; Milman, 1907: Table D)¹⁶.

It was at this critical time in 1905 that PIL began its local operations. There were discussions between Walker and government officials at Thursday Island, who had already assisted some islands to buy boats to be worked collectively, possibly from 1903 (see Ganter, 1994: 68-88 for a history of the company boat system). Whereas PIL purchased its small second-hand luggers and cutters and then negotiated the terms of their use, the department obliged the Islanders to find a seller and agree on a price. Credit to buy stores for the first trip was then negotiated with one of the hotel keepers on Thursday Island or sometimes the government through the protector.

On their return with shell, etc., every trip, the vendor gets 50% and in later agreements 75% of the nett proceeds, in reduction of the amount due for the boat. The Protector gets the shell, etc., sold for them and sees that they get fair market rates.

Out of the balance they pay, or rather the Protector pays for them, the indebtedness for stores, and on every trip, they purchase stores for the next trip, after which the rest is divided among the crew (Peterson, 1905).

Towards the end of January 1906, however, the local protector approached PIL to help the people of Badu and Erub (Darnley Island) to purchase boats. Managing director Walker agreed, stating that 'if the Government will find half the money required we shall be pleased to find the other half, all payments from the natives in reduction of the liability for the boats to be equally divided between

the Government and the Company' (Walker, 1906a). Arrangements were completed in February 1906 for the purchase of three boats at a total cost of £505, 'the Govt. providing £245 and the Papuan Industries Limited £260 – 5% interest to be charged on the money advanced' (Roth, 1906a). Walker professed himself gratified 'that the Queensland Government ... have invited us to co-operate with them in helping the natives under these very critical circumstances' (Walker, 1906b). Thus, from 1906 a dual system operated based on financing and ultimate control and, whereas PIL boats sold their catch at the Badu store, the protector's boats brought their catch to Thursday Island for sale by the government agent. The working and care of the boats in which the protector had an interest were overseen initially by the island mamoose and later by the councillors and superintendent-teachers, who were 'responsible to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the proper care of the vessel and the disposal of the produce earned, through the protector at Thursday Island, and the equal distribution of the nett proceeds' (Annual Report, 1907: 16). While initially the partnership worked reasonably well and to the mutual benefit of both parties, it became more fractious as the department increased its control over the Islanders, a situation not fully resolved until PIL failed during the depression and was sold to the government in 1929.

Other fissures were beginning to appear in the company boat system with the potential to split communities. From at least 1907, PIL practised two different systems of providing Islanders with their boats, which were

either let out to natives under an arrangement by which the proceeds are divided into three parts – one-third going to the Company, one-third to the men, and one-third for working expenses, stores and insurance; or have been sold to natives, and are being paid for by instalments out of the money they are able to earn by diving for Pearls and

pearl-shell, and collecting Turtle-shell, Bêche-de-mer and other produce of the Sea (Walker, 1908: 11-12).

Examples of the former were the *Mabuiag* and *Uropi*, owned by the Mabuyag Islanders but controlled by the company from its headquarters at Badu, 'under sanction from the Aboriginal Department'; others, like the *Lacandola* were owned by PIL but 'rented or chartered to the natives, the Papuan Industries Ltd still holding their title to the boats' (Milman, 1911). PIL argued that the crew of the former could not be considered their employees, unlike the crew of the latter, which was an unsatisfactory state of affairs for department bureaucrats wishing to impose a single uniform and comprehensive policy.

Moreover, once they had purchased their two initial cutters, the Mabuyag Islanders allowed their insurances to lapse and refused to renew (O'Brien, 1906b); a few did not often go out in the boats but nevertheless expected 'to get as large a share of the profits as the man who gets the most shell and works the hardest' (Cairns, 1906: 10); moreover, the cutters lay idle on the beach about 80% of the time, the younger men preferring

to remain ashore playing cards, dancing, and now and again go out dugong fishing. The cocoanuts have again proved a good standby for them, and with the fish, which this year have been plentiful, starvation has been averted. Only a very few go to work in their gardens. When the boats do go to work there are 53 men aboard, and it is difficult to imagine how they all manage to find sleeping room, etc. (Cairns, 1905: 12).

In 1908, Cairns (1908: 25) reported that the men were working four boats,

each of about seven or eight tons register. Two of these, the "Mabuiag"

and "Urupi", are their own property, and two were given by the Papuan Industries, Limited, to certain natives to "work out" on fairly easy terms. I regret that I cannot report very favourably on their ability or willingness to work these boats. When they first got them, they worked splendidly. During the first fourteen months their total catch of shell was 4 tons 8 cwt, while their catch during the two years 1907 and 1908 amounted to only half that quantity. As soon as the novelty of possessing boats of their own wore off, their zeal lessened.

The two boats, owned by PIL and skippered by the Mabuyag Islander Mauga and Kaio Nelem Kris from Tanna, were, respectively, the *Thalmar* which cost £73 and the *Lacandola* which cost £22, both purchased in early 1907. Samoan George Hankin bought the *Likoura* for £35 (Costin, 1908a).

According to local Protector and Inspector of Pearlshell Fisheries, John Moody Costin (1908b), all three boats were in debt to the company at the end of the 1908 financial year, *Thalmar* for £124.1.10; *Lacandola* for £64.0.6; and *Likoura* for £81.18.3. This level of debt concerned the government, which advised against the department or any private company selling any more boats to Islanders. Moreover, the department's company boats were suffering from competition from PIL 'owing to the foolishly liberal supplies of tucker given by the Company, and consequently the crews of the Protector's boats have gone to the Company as soon as I have shortened supplies of tucker or attempted to put any of their earnings in the Bank to meet depreciation'.

Costin also considered that, with five boats in all, Mabuyag was oversupplied. Most telling, however, was his objection to PIL's

general policy, which

seems to be to make all the natives their own master, with which I do not agree. Like whites some of them will work satisfactorily for themselves and others must have an employer or be under discipline to keep them awake. During 1907 the natives on their own boats did not earn half as much as they could have got in wages and they had to provide their own tucker and gear for boat. I do not think the crews on the Harbour Light, *Lacandola*, *Likoura* and *Thalmar* will get out of debt even under the conditions stated in my letter and I think that the Company should then be requested to seize the boats and instructed to take out Articles and sign on the crews at a stated wage per month in the same way that ... other fleet owners had to do ... long before the Papuan Industries arrived (Costin, 1908b).

By 1909 the *Thalmar* and *Lacandola* were still heavily in debt and unlikely to be free 'for some time' (Annual Report, 1909: 19). *Lacandola* was still being worked out at the end of 1910, captained by Luffman Kris, Kaio's Mabuyag-born son (Walker, 1910; Ned Luffman, pers. comm., 1991). A new firm, the Mabuiag Company, was formed in 1910 'for the purposes of swimming-diving and will probably establish its headquarters at Mabuiag Island'. It intended to apply to be allowed to work its boats under the PIL system and would therefore threaten the profits of the 15 swimming-diving and bêche-de-mer boats worked under the local protector's control (Allen, 1910). From a single brief mention in Wyben Pearling Co. Ltd (1912) the Mabuiag Co. would appear to be a subsidiary of Burns Philp Pty Ltd's Wyben Pearling Fleet, taking over seven of its cutters: *Bee*, *Cricket*, *Fly*, *Gnat*, *Wasp*, *Moth* and *Marie*.

Although most of the company boats were being worked 'in the usual haphazard manner', the Mabuyag boats profited from the increase in shell prices to £250 per ton in 1910. The weather was against them in 1911 but the *Uropi* still managed to earn over £190, the *Mabuiag* over £115 and the *Lacandola* over £60. Moreover, fifteen of the young men had 'signed on diving boats at £2.10s per month, and that always brings in a certain amount of food and money monthly' (Annual Reports, 1910: 18, 1911: 18-19). Unfortunately, the *Mabuiag* was wrecked early in July 1913 after breaking loose from her mooring. Despite initial reluctance, the insurance company agreed to pay £62.10.0 (Annual Report, 1913: 14).

In 1912 Mabuyag, along with most of the other inhabited outer islands, was declared an Aboriginal reserve (R33), a hugely significant step in the department's tightening of control over Islanders' earnings, habits and traditional freedom of movement. On 21 December of that year island fund regulations were gazetted, to which the people of each island, henceforth legally alcohol-free, would contribute not only all fines, penalties and taxes collected but also a percentage of male wages and net company boat earnings (see Shnukal, paper on Administration, this volume). The LMS, however, was reluctant to cede complete control and antagonism between the missionaries and pearlers resurfaced in mid-1913, when the Rev. Thomas Oliver Harries moved to Mabuyag. He immediately applied for a special lease of 20 acres of land at Dabangay, close to Panay, for missionary and industrial purposes. Despite Mabuyag's status as an Aboriginal reserve, local protector William Miller Lee-Bryce and most of his superiors in Brisbane preferred an application by Wyben Pearling Co. for land on which to build a pearling station, trading depot and store.¹⁷ This was a subsidiary company of Burns Philp Pty Ltd, formed in December 1912 with the transfer

of 28 pearling luggers. It was granted a 21-year special lease (SL 1833) at Panay on 6 January 1914, on the understanding that 'no Japanese or other alien labour' be employed (Mitchell, 1913), and became 'the only pearlshellers working from [Mabuyag] having a fleet of swimming cutters' (Mackenzie, 1918: 60). The company opened a retail store and built a comfortable house for the manager, James Lequire Adams (Newton, 1916: 493). However, the men were apparently reluctant to work for the company and on 28 February 1919 the lease was transferred to former Burns Philp manager, Arthur Broadbent.¹⁸ The land and several boats were formally registered on 2 May 1919 and paid to 31 October 1935 (Queensland Department of Public Lands, 1912-1916; Wyben Pearling Co. Ltd, 1920: 71, 1921: 77). One of the boats was the bêche-de-mer ketch *Dinton*, which was fishing near Cooktown in late 1920, crewed by Iona from Mabuyag among others (Queensland Department of Justice, 1920).¹⁹

In 1915 the department advanced £170 for the *Mabuiag* and £150 to Luffman for the *Jimmy* (Handley, 1916). It also proposed to have three new cutters built for the people of Mabuyag and Badu, at a cost of about £280 each (Lee-Bryce, 1915). The Mabuyag Islanders had not taken kindly to the constraints of being 'under the Act' after so many years of relative liberty and they and the Erub men were viewed 'as being the most unsatisfactory of the islands in the management of company boats' (Annual Report, 1916: 9). However, by 1917 both the *Mabuiag* and *Jimmy* were 'working much better', with the latter now clear of debt and the former poised to be free of debt by the end of the year. The reason for this burst of activity was the removal of the *Uropi* from Mabuyag for 'mismanagement' and her rental to Boigu and Dauan (Annual Report, 1917: 7). By 1918 the local protector reported that 'Mabuiag – previously looked upon as

the worst island in the strait as regards boat management and work – this year has come out top of the poll.’ As a reward, the *Uropi* was returned to them (Annual Report, 1918: 5) (Figures 9-18).



FIG. 9. Pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7450).



FIG. 10. Pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7449).



FIG. 11. Crew of the pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH-7548-0, EH-7555-0, EH-7556-0).



FIG. 12. Divers of the pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953. Ali Hankin 4th left (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7553).



FIG. 13. Kawane Motlop, skipper of the pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7557).



FIG. 14. Stephen and Tom Jack, pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7558).



FIG. 15. Pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7551).



FIG. 16. Pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7554).



FIG. 17. Pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7547).



FIG. 18. Opening pearl shells on board the pearling lugger *Uropi*, Mabuyag, 1952-1953 (Barbara Stevenson Collection, Queensland Museum: EH7552).

Then, in 1921, a rich pearlshell bed with permanent clear water was discovered northwest of Mabuyag and individual earnings increased, averaging over £100 per month per boat (Annual Report, 1921: 4). The local protector recommended that 'a proclamation under Section 13 of the *Pearlshell and Bêche-de-mer Fishery Act Amendment Act* of 1891 be framed closing the area, but excepting the aboriginal owned boats from the provisions of the proclamation' (Holmes, 1921). While the Queensland government appears to have had the power to reserve particular fishing areas for company boats inside the three mile limit of the coast or one of the islands, such a rule would have been difficult to enforce and politically unpopular with the master shellers and does not appear to have been followed through.²⁰

In line with its protection policies, which reached their height during the interwar period, the department in August 1921 mandated that 'all the native-owned fishing vessels' should bypass Thursday Island and conduct all their affairs at the PIL station at Badu under the supervision of the local protector (Annual Report, 1921: 6). The department had initially favoured PIL in part because cashed-up crews were diverted away from the temptations of Thursday Island to the Badu store, a practice bitterly opposed by the tradespeople of the island. This new directive further enraged them and they put considerable pressure on the department to allow the government-controlled company boats to continue to come to that island. PIL supported the change in policy, citing the temptations to drink and gamble on Thursday Island and a court case in late 1922

when a number of Mabuyag Islanders were charged with obtaining liquor from the Japanese diving boats at Mabuyag (Harman, 1922).

As it had done for so many years, Mabuyag continued to provide a sheltered anchorage for pearling luggers working in the vicinity. The intermingling of crews on shore fostered the emerging pan-Islander identity and solidarity, which would become important factors in the 1936 maritime strike, as well as new hybrid forms of cultural expression. Mabo (1984: 34) describes how in July 1920, a group of luggers, sheltering from heavy seas, brought to Mabuyag some of the best dancers from Badu, Mua (Banks Island), Yam, and Mer.

During the two weeks that followed, the men became involved in a dance workshop. This activity was successful. It developed a new dance which incorporated the traditional Kab-Kar and the recently introduced Taibobo into one single dance, now known as Segur Kab. Play song became part of that dance. The title for both the dance and song became Segur Kaba Wed meaning 'play dance and song'. This dance is now widely known in North Queensland and Papua. Original dance movements of the play dance mimed movements of animals, people doing different activities, games and weather... Movements of these dances were extremely accurate.

On 12 December 1922, Mabuyag-born Alfred Hankin was accidentally drowned off Passage Island, near Mabuyag; his body was never recovered. Alfred was the son of George Hankin, 17 years old and a skin diver on the *Jimmy*, a Mabuyag company boat captained by Luffman with a crew of 13. Luffman described what happened in his evidence given at the Thursday Island inquest on 19 December 1922:

We started work at about 10 a.m. I was in the boat. The others were swimming. At about 12 noon, all the men came on deck for dinner. The cook looked round and said 'Where's Alfred'. I said "He is at the other side of the boat.' The cook, Johnny, looked out and said 'I no see him.' I then called all hands together and said 'Where is Alfred'. Alfred was about 17 years of age and a native of Mabuig. We put down a buoy and tried to go up against the tide to look for Alfred. I then called the *Argan*, another Mabuig cutter which was working near. I asked the captain to get a diver to put the dress on and go down to look for Alfred. Tipot was the diver. He is a Badu man. There was about 7 fathoms of water in the place. The diver looked for Alfred for about 6 hours, but found no sign of him. The tide was running very strong out to sea. We searched about for three days but failed to find any trace of Alfred. Tipot the diver tell me he see one shark at that place. I think might be a shark get Alfred or he might lose his wind and get drowned. Suppose he been drowned the tide would take him out to sea. At about 9 a.m. on the 15th I left for Thursday Island and arrived here on the 16th. I brought all my crew in, except Alfred. When we were working I suppose we would be spread over an area of about 40 square yards. The bottom was clear and sandy. There were a few sea weeds at the bottom. We were working for an hour or more before Alfred was missed. He had brought up about four shell. I was swimming myself and I saw Alfred in the water. I was in the water when the cook said to me 'Where is Alfred'. I said 'he on other side of boat' he say No. Then

all go down to look for him. I heard no one sing out. I saw no blood in the water. Alfred was a very good boy. He never kicked up any row. He never growl. I think shark take him (Queensland Department of Justice, 1922-1923).

The following year (1923) was a bad year for fishing operations, made worse by a hurricane which destroyed gardens and badly affected the amount of the catch of the western island boats, including Mabuyag. The shell price continued low and the department became anxious about finding the money to continue its operations, let alone make inroads into its considerable debt. Moreover, the swimming divers, who used only a helmet and corselet, were being driven from shallow waters by the Japanese, who, they claimed, were deliberately attracting sharks to those areas by throwing meat tins and grease over the side. In July 1924 the crews of various western island company boats signed declarations of protest. They signed a second petition on 25 August 1925 against the Japanese diving in shallow water (Annual Report, 1923: 6; O'Leary, 1923).²¹ Local protector Cornelius (Con) O'Leary reported that it was 'common knowledge that the Japanese intend to clear out the pearlshell from shallow areas, and then resort to the deeper water again, leaving nothing but depleted grounds for the natives to work.' Like his predecessor, Holmes, in 1921, he advised reserving for Islander swimming divers all Queensland waters of less than five fathoms deep at low water. Legally, this could be done 'by an amendment of Section 13 of the *Pearlshell and Bêche-de-mer Fishery Act Amendment Act* of 1891, empowering the Governor in Council to exempt any person or class of person from any prohibition proclaimed under the Section' (O'Leary, 1925). That is, the government would first prohibit the taking of marine produce from such areas and then exempt the Islander-

owned cutters from the prohibition. Given the practical, legal and political difficulties of enforcement, it is unlikely that the prohibition was proceeded with.

Sharks posed a constant danger to the swimming divers. On 9 April 1929 another tragedy occurred when Luffman's son, Ned Luffman, was taken by a shark in Badu harbour. He and Macfarlane Misi, also of Mabuyag, were swimming in Badu harbour around noon. Misi gave evidence that day, stating that they

swam from the *Urupi* to the *Jimmy* about 100 yards away, all the dinghies were ashore at Dogai station. The water was very dirty and we did not see the shark. Ned Luffman was in front of me and called out shark got me. I swam up to him and there was lots of blood in the water. I saw Dulua, William and others pull Ned Luffman on to the *Jimmy*. I saw that the shark had bitten Ned Luffman on the leg and thigh. Ned was alive when they got him on the *Jimmy* but died soon after, I think about 10 minutes (Queensland Department of Justice, 1929).

Writing in 1913, Lee-Bryce had made no secret of his desire to control all the company boats for ideological, policy and, above all, financial reasons. In 1929, with Walker dead and low prices for PIL's shell, copra and rubber, the Queensland government purchased its land, stock and buildings on Badu – boats, boat-slip, store, wooden bungalows and stone jetty – and could at last impose a uniform policy. Renamed Aboriginal Industries Ltd, it began operations officially on 1 July 1930, becoming the Aboriginal Industries Board (AIB) in 1934 and establishing stores on most of the islands (Annual Report, 1934: 18).²² However, in 1932, much to the protector's irritation, the former PIL manager, Daniel Coulter Harman, now manager of Hodel's

Ltd, a Thursday Island firm long associated with local missionary activity, commenced 'a system of allowing unrestricted credit to the Torres Strait Islanders without reference to the local Protector or to any consideration for the ability of the natives to pay for such goods'. He was informed that this was 'contrary to the system of protection in Torres Strait and no action would be taken to assist him in obtaining payment for such unauthorised debts' (Bleakley, 1936). The department by now had almost complete control over Islander marine labour and earnings, whether on company or master boats. All 'protected' Islanders' wages were paid to the local protector; and whatever was left after maintaining dependents and contributing to their island and insurance funds, boat reserve and Torres Strait Seamen's Hospital the protector deposited in the men's individual savings accounts. Boats were also being sent further afield down the Great Barrier Reef, keeping their crews away from home for extended periods and putting strains on family and ceremonial life.²³

In early January 1933 the Poid boat, *Manu*, was transferred to Mabuyag after her poor performance and allegations of sorcery against some of her crew (MacFarlane, 1932). The acting protector advised the department that the Mabuyag people had agreed to take over the boat for £500, 'the amount of her Loan Account in this office', despite this sum being 'probably a little in excess of the actual value of the *Manu*'. In fact, the debt was only £331.4.0, because a sale of pearlshell had not been credited to the account. The vessel was renamed *Mabuiag* and on 14 January she left Mabuyag Island with a full crew to work trochus shell (Green, 1933).

Islanders continued to protest against the deliberate practice of the Japanese of throwing offal into the sea in an attempt to attract sharks and drive local swimming divers from the pearling grounds. In October

1934, Luffman joined Wasaga from Poid and Natanielu from Badu in lodging official complaints. The immediate cause of concern was the narrow escape by Uiduldam from Badu from a shark at Mangrove Reef near Boigu. Luffman's statement read:

On last Tuesday when we working off Mangrove Island in morning time alongside several diving boats belonging to Messrs Burns Philp, Cleveland, Bowden and Morey and Company, boats Urupi, Argan and Yaza. We were all mix up working together. First time we see grease on the water like turtle fat and then on bottom we see turtle back with turtle hands still sticking to shell. Plenty sharks swim round all the time under that grease and we have to knock off work because the sharks are too bad. We not sure which boat spill that turtle grease or turtle guts but one of the diving boats did it.

On Monday October 1st we were working in same place when I see one kerosene tin floating on water between we and the diving boats. I send one boy in a dinghy to catch that kerosene tin, because I think he might be good to use. The boy bring that kerosene tin back and we find in it cooked turtle meat and grease. From boiling the meat in tin the outside of tin was covered all round with grease. I know that shark come after that tin so we shift to another place for work. I saw plenty shark that time too. I still got that same tin (Luffman, 1934).

The Japanese were threatened with the closure of certain areas, a letter to this effect was sent to the Japanese Association of Thursday Island and the matter was settled (Armstrong, 1934).

1935-1949

Having gained control over all company boats and 'protected' marine labour after its purchase of PIL, the government used island regulations and its resident European superintendent-teachers to limit Islander freedom of movement and association. However, the men's engagement in the marine industries, especially on the master boats, provided one of the means – along with religion and education – for them to mix with others from different islands on neutral, non-traditional ground. Predominantly Mabuyag Islander crews on Wyben Pearling Co.'s *Panton* and *Dulcia*²⁴, for example, served with men from Badu, Poid, St Paul's Mission and Injinoo in the late 1920s, while Peter Eseli and Gib Billy crewed on Morey and Co.'s *Taka* in 1938 alongside five Murray and two Saibai Islanders (Seamen's Discharge Register, 1926, 1927, 1938). With greater knowledge, shared maritime experiences and family visiting came a diminution of previous mistrust and far greater camaraderie and political solidarity than ever before. This psychological impetus towards the creation of 'one people' was strengthened during and after World War II, when marriages between peoples of the western and eastern Straits, a rare pre-war occurrence, became increasingly frequent.

The first political manifestation of this emerging pan-Islander identity was the longest maritime strike in Torres Strait history (Sharp, 1980).²⁵ It began in December 1935, fueled by grievances of many kinds, and soon spread to all the islands except Dauan. The immediate cause was the withholding of earnings, the local protector's refusal to hear Islanders' complaints, his threats to remove their boats and the requirement that they purchase all goods from the government store on Badu; but Islanders had also had enough of the many humiliations and frustrations of

the Aboriginal Protection Acts. The strike was preceded by a series of smaller actions against the DNA company boat system: in 1931, for example, 44 Mabuyag Islanders joined the 32 Erub Islanders who had failed to report for work on board their trochus boat, *Don*, along with trochus boat crews from Boigu, Badu, Dauan, Mer, Mua, Poruma (Coconut Island) and Saibai (see Appendix). This mini-strike, like all the others, was quickly resolved.

John Donald McLean, who had previously served in New Guinea, was appointed local magistrate and protector in 1934 after the unexpected death of Harold Thomas Green in September 1933. McLean was generally held to be overbearing and unsympathetic and he exacerbated matters by his harsh treatment of the dissidents. In December 1935 he arrested six Islanders who had deserted from a company boat and, in his function as magistrate, sentenced them to one month's imprisonment in the Thursday Island gaol with hard labour (O'Leary, 1936b: 23). The Bishop of Carpentaria was so concerned that he took it upon himself to write to the Queensland governor about the seriousness of the Islanders' 'passive resistance', advising that the situation 'requires a man of a different temperament to the present protector (J.D. McLean) if it is to be redeemed' (Davies, 1936).²⁶

McLean left Thursday Island on 7 January 1936 to interview the Western Islanders, apparently unaware or dismissive of any impending trouble. At every island except Dauan he

found the men insubordinate and uncontrollable. The procedure at each place visited was the same. After addressing the meeting the men would stand up at a signal from their spokesman and say 'We do not agree to work on Island boats'. When I requested their reasons they

would walk out of the room without answering (McLean, 1936).

McLean arrived on Mabuyag on 8 January, left the following day, returned in the evening of 16 January and spent the next day there. He reported to his department that the men on Mabuyag told him they

would not work the boats because I promised them two months holidays last year and that I did not give them. They admitted that I promised them the holidays during the South East and that the first drift ended at Easter and they did not come back until August also that no one at Mabuyag Island had asked me for holidays at any time last year. The boats working pearlshell complained that they only got fourpence (4d) per lb for pearlshell at Badu island. Mr Frith [Philip Raymond Frith, the government schoolteacher] turned up a form and saw that they got five pence (5d) per lb last drift. They also complained that when they were not working boats well I threatened to take the *Jimmy* and *Uropi* away. I pointed out that I had done so but as their work had improved I have left the boats with them (McLean, 1936).

According to Jacob Gabey from Mer, who was then attending the refresher course at the Mabuyag training school for teachers run by Frith, the unrest on Mabuyag had started about 20 December when Boingan, the captain of the Boigu boat, *Saruai*, came from Thursday Island to report that the strike of company boat crews was arranged at all the islands. According to the strike leaders, this was so that Torres Strait would be handed over to the Commonwealth (McLean, 1936; see also Wetherell, 2004).

Realising that McLean was antagonising the Islanders, the department sent its deputy

chief protector, the more conciliatory Cornelius (Con) O'Leary, who had been local protector for eight years during the 1920s, to attempt to resolve the situation. He arrived towards the end of January 1936 with three police officers from Brisbane and immediately set out to investigate 'the origin and cause of the strike', visiting Mabuyag, Saibai, Boigu, Dauan and Yam in February 1936 and returning to Thursday Island on 20 February. His first visit was to Mabuyag, where he arrived on 14 February and was met by Frith and the three councillors. The day before his arrival, the mission vessel *Herald* had arrived with the Islander priests, Captain Oth and Joseph Lui, and deacon, Francis Bowie. Schoolteacher Frith refused permission for Bowie to enter the village, confining him to the mission area on the grounds that he was a strike agitator. O'Leary commented that, whatever the truth of this,

Frith was of necessity informed that unless he had definite evidence to support his opinion his action was unwarranted and could not be supported. ... It is desired to stress that Mr Frith is endeavouring to perform his duty under particularly extenuating circumstances and his action on this occasion can be attributed to a misdirected zeal for the safety and contentment of the people under his care (O'Leary, 1936a).

W.S. Munro, a departmental clerk, and Constable Gordon Furlong were left at Mabuyag in case of trouble, the former being designated as an 'assistant government teacher' with instructions to observe and report the views of the Islanders. Frith had reported that the men had refused to carry out 'village work' in accordance with the terms of the Island Regulations.

On arrival it was ascertained that the men had refused work on the

day assigned for such duty but later had carried out the work. The strike in this instance was organised by two (2) men Supia and Dulaware [probably Supia Misi and Duluwa Whap]. Both men were charged before the Native Court with inciting the people to disobey the Regulations and were sentenced to fourteen (14) days imprisonment. The immediate result of this action was the unanimous declaration by all of the men to declare the strike off, so far as it applied to Island administration (O'Leary, 1936a).

The Mabuyag men's overt reasons for striking were that the protector failed to pay adequate wages; he failed to honour his promise to pay fivepence (5d) a pound for mother-of-pearl shell; and the necessity for company boats to leave the island early in January for work. O'Leary rejected these as genuine grievances: 'under cross examination all of the reasons were shown to be fictitious and without foundation'. Moreover, prior to his visit crews had been selected for the boats *Uropi* and *Jimmy*, although no crew offered for the *Mabuiag*.

Before leaving Thursday Island, O'Leary had ascertained that the members of the Pearllshellers Association, who ran the 'master' boats, wished to employ 16 Mabuyag men. Forty-six offered themselves and a ballot was held. When the 16 arrived in Thursday Island, however, only eight were accepted as satisfactory. O'Leary pointed out that 'the rejected men in this instance had always worked on "Company" boats and it is quite evident that they will never obtain a position on a "Master" boat at the regulation rate of wages'. This situation left 20 unemployed men on Mabuyag, who were refusing to work the company boats and had decided to remain ashore if they could not gain work on the master boats.

Sensitive to the welfare of the women and children, O'Leary instructed Frith to open a soup kitchen if necessary, 'to see they do not suffer through the attitude of the men' and he stationed a sailing dinghy at Mabuyag to allow the strikers to obtain dugong and turtle (O'Leary, 1936a).

Another complaint of the men was that they had no opportunity to make gardens, reported O'Leary. He investigated the time worked and earnings of the company boat crews and found that the *Jimmy* worked for five months of the year, with average monthly gross earnings of £2.11.6, *Mabuiag* for eight months, earnings of £1.11.6, and *Uropi* for six months, earnings of £2.6.5. He therefore concluded that this particular complaint was unfounded. The strike on Mabuyag was settled on 27 March and the following day Constable Furlong returned to Thursday Island (Lawrie, n.d.).

When O'Leary arrived in the Strait, only three of the 25 company boats were working; when he left in May 1936, 16 vessels were working; and by July 1936 only two boats from Mer were still on strike (Bleakley, 1936). The stoppage lasted over four months, during which the majority of the 316 men employed on the company boats refused to work (Annual Report, 1936: 11).²⁷ The strike was significant in several ways but principally as an expression of pan-Islander solidarity and a successful game-changer in Islander administration. Officially, the department downplayed its importance, assigning one paragraph in its annual report (1936: 11) to the 'feeling of unrest ... manifested amongst the Islanders resulting in a partial stoppage of work on the boats controlled by the Department for the benefit of the natives.' The Secretary for Health and Home Affairs, Edward (Ned) Hanlon (who was to become Labor Premier from 1946 to 1952) admitted to 'a little trouble at the Torres Strait islands at the beginning of the year' (Hanlon,

1936: 1435). But internal correspondence reveals how much departmental officials feared the destruction of its company boat system, its only antidote for widespread unemployment, since it provided

facilities for every man, irrespective of his ability, to earn for himself and family sufficient to justify a reasonable standard of living. Therefore any action which aims at the scrapping of the "Company" boat system is a serious blow to the prestige of the Queensland government's protection policy and to the economic salvation of the Islanders (O'Leary, 1936a).

A severely shaken administration agreed to many of the demands made by the strikers, passing the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939* to recognise the Islanders' separate identity, instituting more comprehensive measures of self-government and improving medical, educational and other services.

The Islanders had little time to enjoy their political and economic gains. In 1941, Australia declared war on Japan, the Japanese population of Thursday Island was immediately interned and in February 1942 most of the civilian population of Thursday Island and its surrounding islands was evacuated. Almost every seaworthy vessel was commandeered for defence purposes and 765 adult men from every island began to enlist in various military and paramilitary formations, 'the highest per capita enlistment in a military service in Australian history' (Spence, 1999). The Mabuyag Islanders served predominantly in 'B' Company, along with men from Badu and Mua, but after their return to their homes in 1946 they again took up their previous occupations in the marine industries.

The pearling fleet had resumed operations on 1 January 1946 with five boats and, with

high post-war pearlshell and trochus shell prices, the men could earn excellent returns. By mid-year the fleet stood at 32, paid for by £15,000 of accumulated wartime savings 'as cash payments for luggers and cutters and smaller craft'. By the end of 1947 there were 40 island-owned and operated boats, although almost half of these were sailing dinghies and unsuitable for pearling (Raven-Hart, 1949: 117). 'Discharged, members of family groups pooled their deferred pay to buy boats through army disposals. Most of these craft had sails only, no engines, and the islanders skin-dived for shell in easy waters. Gradually they saved money to buy engines and pumps' (Rees & Rees, 1960: 63).

Few of their Japanese pre-war competitors returned to Torres Strait. Queensland government policy opposed their employment in the pearling industry, which it wished to keep a monopoly Islander operation. In the event, a handful of Japanese divers married to British subjects were permitted to return to Thursday Island and in June 1947 there was a short-lived controversy over the Bowden Pearling Company's supposed dismissal of two Islanders in favour of Tomitaro Fujii and Kyu Shibasaki. Acting Shipping Master Hickey refuted the claims: he could not, he reported, 'ascertain the names of any men discharged to make way for the Japanese divers, but the Acting Protector of Islanders informed me that the names given him were Buwa Mene [from Mabuyag] and Marsat Ketchell [from Badu], both Islanders.'

Buwa Mene has been employed since the 6th February as a "skipper", and was originally in charge of the vessel *Thelma*, and on the employment of Shibasaki was given charge of the then newly commissioned vessel *Minerva*, a bigger and much better vessel, and remains in charge.

I am unable to find the name of Marsat Ketchel on the Shipping Articles. A man of this name is reported to be working on an Island boat at Mabuiag ... and has not been employed by Bowden Pearlring Company. However, an islander named Samat Ketchel has been employed by the company in charge of the vessel *Vera* (also 1st diver) since 11/2/1947.

The only diver discharged by the company this season is an islander named Amosa Paiwan, a try-diver,²⁸ and according to the company manager he was discharged (on the 16th June) at the request of the Protector of Islanders to enable the man's return to Mabuiag Island for disciplinary action by the Island Council (Hickey, 1947).

Moreover, Hickey found that, while anti-Japanese feeling persisted among Whites on Thursday Island, he could find 'no evidence of antagonism emanating from responsible islanders working shell to the employment of the Japanese concerned in the industry. It may exist, but my inquiry does not reveal it.' Moreover, Islanders operating shelling boats were approaching Fujii and Shibasaki for advice and instruction. This was on account of the Japanese pearlsheller's pre-war reputation as the most efficient divers in the industry and the Islanders' eagerness 'to take advantage of any opportunity offering to improve their own ability and knowledge, not only in regard to the operation of diving and recovery, but also as to the working of the various grounds following the cycles of "clear water".' The bulk of the post-war recovery was from the Old Grounds in the west and the Japanese divers' knowledge and experience

may be regarded as much superior to that of any Islander working shell today. It will be seen from official

records that for a decade at least prior to 1940 between 89% and 100% of the divers' licenses issued at this port were held by indented Japanese, and the remainder by Halfbloods and Malays. The complete exclusion of these divers has left a gap to be bridged by the Islanders as also other shellers, and this partly explains the keenness of the Islanders (Hickey, 1947).

1950-1980

The close of the 1949 season saw the pearlshell industry returned to its pre-war level but a decade later it fell victim to the production of plastic buttons and a strict grading system, imposed in 1958 by the major buyer, the Otto Gerdau Corporation, which reduced the marketable shells by 80-90% (George, 1996: 27). There followed a long slump in the market, from which it never recovered. Many experienced Torres Strait Island divers and crews were recruited as labourers by railway construction firms in Western Australia, joining countrymen who were increasingly finding jobs in mainland Queensland (George, 1996: 30). By the late 1960s there was virtually no market for pearlshell.

The Torres Strait cash economy, however, remained almost entirely dependent on the marine and associated industries and Mabuyag Islanders continued to sign on articles as crew, tenders, divers and engineers, generally with private companies. Sam Hankin, born in 1916 on Mabuyag, was a trochus and pearl-shell swimming diver on the Mabuyag lugger *Dakaja*. He told Ganter (1987: 111) that, when he was diving from the early 1930s until 1966, the three island councillors appointed a skipper who then took charge of boat and crew. Trochus shelling was done on the new moon when the water was clear, the boats staying out for about two weeks. The shell had to be three inches in diameter (76 mm) and

was landed at Thursday Island. Pearl-shelling, on the other hand, was conducted as day trips between Badu and Deliverance Island (Warul Kawa) with the boats returning at night. Pearl shell was sold to the Island Industries Board store on Badu. Only wages boats collected bêche-de-mer.

Fewer accidents occurred than before but on the last day of November 1957 near Bobo Reef south of Papua New Guinea two divers died of the bends, one of them being Karakasoma (Kara) Kris from Mabuyag (Queensland Department of Justice, 1958). The author Kylie Tennant (1959: 155) remembered him visiting St Paul's: he was among the crew of the lugger *Sylvia* who 'had come ashore for the feast of Michaelmas and danced for us, chanting harmoniously, all in ceremonial palm fronds, with white dancing bands round wrist and ankle.' Almost a decade later came another decompression fatality when in August 1967 the second stern diver, Gordon Mandi from Mabuyag, accidentally died west of West Island (Ului) while diving from the lugger *Sorrel* owned by Cape York Pearling Co. Pty Ltd (Queensland Department of Justice, 1967). The skipper (Alfred Mareko) and at least six other crew members were also born on Mabuyag: Gometara, Gaulai (diver), Charlie Hankin (tender), Rim Kris (forward tender), Rim Kris Junior (forward tender), David Mooka (stern tender) and Daniel Repu (diver).

For a decade it was thought that pearl culture farms might profitably be established in the region to provide marine employment for the Islanders, as they had in Western Australia, where Nippo Pearl, in partnership with the Australian company, Pearls Pty Ltd, began operations at Kuri Bay in 1956 (Ohshima, 1988: 158-159). The Japanese supplied the technical staff and were responsible for marketing; the Australians established and maintained the farms (Anon., 1975: 12). After the first year of operations Kuri Bay

employed up to 50 Torres Strait Islanders (George, 1996: 23). Similar Japanese-Australian joint business ventures began in the strait in 1960.²⁹ Two of these farms were established at abandoned villages on Gialag (Sinju Gai Saicho and Pearls Pty Ltd, which ran a second farm at Badu), and at Poid on Mua (Pearls Pty Ltd). There were also farms on Albany Island (Nishim Pearl Co. and Barrier Reef Pearl Co.), Goode Island (Union Pearl Company and Australasian Pearl Pty Ltd), Packe Island (Queensland Pearl Culture Pty Ltd, then See Hop Co.), Horn Island (Tayio Gyogyo Ltd and Aucher Pty Ltd) and Escape River on the northeast coast of Cape York Peninsula (Kakuda Pearl and Cape York Pearling Co., then Oceangem Pearling). Together they are said to have produced pearls worth over a million dollars by 1970, employing workers from neighbouring islands (Ohshima, 1988; Moon & Moon, 1994: 145; George, 1996: 43). Poid attracted workers mainly from Badu rather than Mabuyag, although most of these had family links to Mabuyag: Jack Ahmat, Siko Joe Ambar, Goomitara Gaulai, Gayai Hankin and Aleam, Ibejan and Moses Mene, for example, are recorded as having worked in pearl farms, some traveling as far as Kuri Bay from 1963 on one-year contracts (Ohshima, 1983: 121; Maegawa, 1994: 62; Lance, 2004: 232; Anthony Hall-Matthews, pers. comm., 2011). However, between 1967 and 1970 there was 'an exceptionally high level of mortality among live pearl shell stocks' (Anon, 1975: 12) and the cultured pearl industry began to decline, the victim of an unknown disease exacerbated by the spillage of an estimated million litres of oil from the oil tanker, *Oceanic Grandeur*. The tanker struck a reef in the Prince of Wales Channel in March 1970, spewing out a slick which covered the seas for several kilometres and required chemical dispersants. By 1971 the industry, worth over \$1,000,000 according to Moon and Moon (1994:145), was irreparably damaged and by

the 1990s 'only a couple of small concerns' survived (Kehoe-Forutan, 1988: 8; Ganter 1994: 226; Moon & Moon, 1994: 145).

Luckily, the ailing cultured pearl industry found a replacement in the lucrative harvest of seafood from Torres Strait waters from the late 1960s, particularly prawns and crayfish but also rock lobster and deep-sea fish. The seafood industry was carried out along commercial lines, though an extension of the Islanders' traditional fishing skills, and was facilitated by the installation of freezer units in the outer islands and in 1968 a prawn processing factory on Thursday Island. This was fed by floating processing plants and mother ships, employing up to 100 women (casual work at 84 cents an hour) and paying trawlermen about 30 cents a pound for their catches. 'In a good season the company can expect to earn \$2 million from the sale of processed prawns to the United States and Japan' (Borrell, 1970). The department commenced a training program in prawn fishing techniques and in March 1971 took delivery of a new prawn trawler, *Kuzi*, for use as a training vessel. In 1973, prawning employed some 50 Islanders and brought in over \$50,000, although the practice raises sensitive questions today about sustainability and long term damage done to the fragile environment by overfishing – a recurrent theme of the Torres Strait marine industries (Bach, 1955: 44; Ganter, 1991, 1994). Moreover, most of the profits are taken out of the strait, some companies trawling over \$500,000 worth of prawns in one year. Crayfishing in the mid-1970s employed about 60 Islanders full time and 30 part time. Jimmy Tuta Luffman, who joined Peddell's crayfish boat Manahiki in the late 1970s – although by this time he had moved with his family to Thursday Island – was one of the many enterprising Mabuyag fishermen who made a good income from small-scale crayfishing for their extended families (Queensland

Department of Justice, 1979). Such 'cottage type' industries depended on large freezers, dependable electricity supply and a reliable air service to southern markets, which were previously not available. They also allowed the Islanders to be 'self-employed and live on their home islands' (Annual Reports, 1971:16, 1973: 25, 1974: 22, 1976: 7, 8).

CONCLUSION

The marine industries, together with the Christianity and government administration, radically altered Torres Strait Islander society and almost every aspect of traditional culture. By bringing together people from all parts of the world and both sides of the Torres Strait ethnological and linguistic divisions in a non-traditional context, all three activities contributed to innovative and unique social, religious and governance structures, music and dance performance and a shared creolised language. All three transformed the physical landscape: the shellers and trepangers (usually also traders) set up shore camps and cut down trees to provide firewood for their trepang pots and later built more permanent structures – jetties, wells, paths, walls, European-style cottages, sheds and stores; the missionaries built chapels, South Sea-style houses, fences and gardens and gathered their converts into villages close to their compounds; the government constructed houses, roads, schools, courthouses and gaols.

All three activities were interlinked, engaged in 'pacifying' and 'civilizing' the Islanders. The first missionary teachers settled on Mabuyag, for example, almost certainly because of the recent establishment of shelling stations. Despite later competition between shellers and missionaries for the Islanders' loyalty, the missionaries depended on both shellers and government for assistance in the early years and, as Ganter (1991: 34) points

out, the 'teachers also formed business alliances with pearl-shellers and ... [s]ome of them became partners in pearl-shell and bêche-de-mer fishing ventures'. In time, the government helped finance the 'company' boats and took over the administration of the island fleets and stores and battled the missionaries for control of the Islanders' 'hearts and minds'. Shellers and government were also interdependent in those early years, the boat captains reporting on significant events and navigational hazards and the government providing a rendezvous for the unloading of shell and the loading of supplies, as well as a lockup for recalcitrant crews. Unable to provide a constant presence, the government appointed resident European shellers and teachers as justices of the peace, advisors to local councils and ultimately superintendents subject only to the protectors' control.

Mabuyag Islanders are recorded as being employed as 'swimming divers' even before the first pearling stations were established on the island in 1872 and because of Mabuyag's central location and safe anchorage, it became a headquarters for the pearling fleets from 1873. This paper has discussed Mabuyag's early shelling stations, their crews and managers; the disappearance of the major firms during the downturn of 1905; the hazards faced by the divers; the implementation of the 'company' boat system; and the effects of the 1936 strike on Mabuyag Islanders, who continued to participate in the marine industries even after the pearling industry fell victim to the competition of plastic buttons.

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APPENDIX

Some Mabuyag Islander crew lists and vessels taken from departmental files, annual reports, inquests and discharge registers with Queensland State Archive file numbers provided. Surnames are rarely given. Where both a typed name and signature are given but differ in spelling, I have chosen the signature and in a few cases used contemporary spellings. Explanatory additions are in square brackets. Some lists are incomplete.

July 1913 (Annual Report, 1913: 14)

Mabuiag: Finiem, Bani, Wyatt, Wap, Maom [Mauma], Matathia, Tekelu, Paiwan, Repu, Mooka

13 March 1922 (A/58761)

Uropi: Bagai, Frank, Mani, Eseli, Min, Mareko, Enock, Tekelu, Misi

17 May 1922 (A/58761)

Mabuiag: Joseph, Waiat, Kamoi, Repu, Paiwan, Zezeu, Bani, Banasa, Shadrach [Satraika], Joseph Mooka, Nauma, Phineasa, Mooka, Iona Mooka, Ephraim Banasa, Gauri, Bagiri

Jimmy: Willie, Luffman, Mataio, Jimmy, Arkedin, Luffman, Alfred, Misimam, Johnny, Episaia, Sakawai, Arona, Magala, Manase, Tom

Uropi: Misi, Tekelu, Frank, Elisara, Enock, Mande, Esili, Bagai, Are, Gelam, Min, Matatia, Kadiab, Joe Dorrick, Mene, Wap

14 June 1922 (A/58761)

Mabuiag: Shadrach [Satraika], Waiat, Zezeu, Repu, Kamoi, Paiwan, Banasa, Bani, Joseph, Joseph Mooka, Phineasa, Nauma, Iona, Gauri, Ephraim, Bagiri, Mooka

Uropi: Misi, Mareko, Enock, Bagai, Frank, Tekelu, Eseli, Kadiab, Mande, Mene, Min, Matatia, Joe Dorrick, Elisara, Are [Harry], Wap

1 July 1922 (A/58761)

Jimmy: Jimmy Luffman, Episaia Hankin,

Mataio, Willie, Arona, Sakawai, Luffman, Arkedin, Johnny, Misimam, Magala, Tom Jack, Alfred

26 September 1922 (A/58761)

Jimmy: Luffman (captain), Episaia, Alfred, Mataio, Johnny, Jimmy, Sakawai, Willie, Arona, Arkedin, William, Misimam, Tom Jack, Magala, Manase

27 September 1922

Uropi: Misi, Mene, Johnny Bagai, Enock, Frank, Esili, Mande, Are [Harry], Mareko, Elisara, Tekelu, Min, Matasia, Kadiab, Wap

Mabuiag: Joseph Mooka, Mooka, Nauma, Waiat, Paiwan, Bani, Joseph, Kamui, Uboi (Shadrack) [Satraika], Zezeu, Banasa, Phineasa, Repu, Iona, Bagari, Gauri, Ephraim

12 December 1922 (JUS/N753/39/23)

Jimmy: Luffman (captain), Misimam Luffman, Jimmy Luffman, Alfred Hankin, Mataio Hankin, Episia Hankin, William, Sakawai, Johnny Kris (cook), Arona Kris, Willy, Magala, Tom Jack, Isakara

1925 (A/58761)

Uropi: Min (captain), Aingana, Eseli, Obadiah, Mene, Misi, Tekelu, Wap, Joseph, Kadiab, Daniel

Mabuiag: Phineasa, Banasa, Johnny Bagai, Paiwain, Sakawai, Mataio, Bagiri, Bani, Waiat, Mareko, Repu

Jimmy: Jimmy Luffman (captain), Arona, Magala, Billy, Johnny, Bob, Luffman, Arkedin, Enock

1926 (SRS 723/1/1)

Panton: Gillam Warri, Andrew, Ibigen, Kame, Kamui, Joseph, Obadiah, Paea, Macfarlane, Billy Hankin (also Albert Bowie, Bent [William] and Oliphanu [Panuel] from Badu; Banas from Poid)

1927 (SRS 723/1/1)

Dulcia: George Hankin, Tekelu, Alickson, Kame, Billy Hankin, Duluwa, Aporia, Amosa

(also Henry and Billy Lifu from Small River [Injinoo]; Jack and Andai Ware from St Paul's)

Panton: Gillam Warria, Ephraim, Kamui, Harry Min, Gabai, Amarama, Macfarlane

Kestrel:³⁰ Tom Jack, Elisara, Niki, Tabiti, Balgub, Willie (also Jimmy Gypsy and Ned Morrison and Aken from St Paul's)

1929 (SRS 723/1/1)

Mabuyag: Gabai Frank, Amosa, Charlie Hankin, Kamui, Maia, Sakaio, Gowrie (also Lui Mills from Naghir)

24 July 1931 (SRS 723/1/1)

Unnamed trochus boats: Alickson, Harry Min, Waimaga, Ephraim, Misimam, Billy Hankin, Charlie Mene, Joseph Mooka, Johnny Bagai, Eseli, Phineasa, Paiwain, Manase, Satraika, Bagiri, Repu, Ibigen, Billy, Niki, Arona, Pasea Wap, Elisara William, Nakau, Aiaba, George Hankin, Gabai Frank, Nakau Frank, Macfarlane Misi, Luffman, Jimmy Luffman, Isakara, Amarama, Paimimia, Andrew Motlop, Balgub, Maitui, Bob, Apria, Duluwa Wap, Tabitai, Misa, Magala, Obediah, Sakaio, Ephraim, Elap Price³¹

1936 (A/58853)

Jimmy: Luffman, Arona, Tom Jack, Jimmy Luffman, Repu, Namui, Bob Lee, Mataio Hankin, Magala, Enock, Baniam, Mareko, Johnny Bagai

Uropi: J. Mooka, Kerakosama, Elisara, David Mooka, Kawane, Iona Mooka, Willie Mauma, Kame, Maitui, Tuta, Niki, Tabitia, Satraika, George Hankin, Manase, Misimam, Aiaba, Alickson

Mabuyag: Pasea, Adiadi [Peter Eseli], Sakawai, Jackie, Alickson, Maia, Ganaia, Masiur, Obediah, Amosa, Numa, John, Gesu, Aporia, Balgub, Wanakai, George Hankin, Andrew, Paimimia, Kewa, Guru, Epesia Hankin, Gelam, Misimam, Aiaba

1939 (SRS 723/1/3)

Hankin:³² E. Hankin, Johnny Bagai, Mataio

Hankin, Manase, Bageri, George Hankin, Satraika, Karakasoma, Ganai, Gowrie Peter, Charlie Hankin, Gesa Hankin, Billy Hankin

Unnamed fishing boats (probably *Jimmy* and another): Aramama, Luffman (owner and captain), Numa, Jimmy Luffman, Aporia, Maia Missi, Duluwa Whap, Kawane Motlop, Bob, Kepu, Jimmy Maira, MacFarlane Misi, Misimam Luffman, Harry Min, Misi, Sakaio, Aiaba, Elisara, Kokowa, Tuta Luffman, Arona Kris, Willie Mauma, Alickson Motlop, Billiam Magala, Guru Phineasa, John Luffman, Jackie Phineasa

□ ENDNOTES

1. I should clarify that, although I am not an historian, I was requested by Mabuyag Islanders to give an account of Mabuyag's association with the marine industries from documentary sources, many not readily available. Hence the emphasis on named individuals and the contextualising of topics Mabuyag people have indicated are of particular interest to them: the contest between pearlshellers and missionaries for control over the Islanders; the workings of the shelling stations; the effects of the downturn of 1905; government policy and the 'company' boat system; and the effects of the 1936 strike. At the editors' request, I have included a brief overview of pearl culture in Torres Strait. This no doubt skews the overall balance of the paper, for which I apologise to those historians whose field it properly is. For more orthodox historical coverage of the Torres Strait marine industries, the reader is referred to Bach (1955), in the author's opinion, the most substantial and comprehensive scholarly account and the source of most subsequent work, as well as the scores of publications in Shnukal (2003) under the heading 'Marine Environment, Management & Industries', notably the monographs of Beckett (1987), Ganter (1994) and Mullins (1995).
2. Chester translates *Marbiack laag - laag!* as 'Jervis island. Peace! Peace!'; *ipikagee* as 'women'; and *laag nino laag* as 'peace, really peace'. A more accurate translation, courtesy of Rod Mitchell, is: 'Mabuyag this place!'; 'wives and children' or 'women'; and 'home (island), your home'.
3. Ngukis (Crocodile clan) is tentatively identified from W.H.R. Rivers' Table 4 in Haddon (1904) as the son of Koedhi and Kiesu and grandson of Bari the first chief of Wagadagam. He was born in the 1850s and married Baiti and Bukari. According to Eseli (1998: 88), he owned the land from Sapalay to Bidhi Kwiiku. I cannot place 'Edowah'.
4. Thompson fled to Sydney but was back in July 1872 as master and owner of the cutter *Enchantress*. He hired Gebar and Mabuyag Islanders as swim divers but was arrested by Jardine for fishing without a government licence and the Islanders discharged, 'since which he has had nothing' (Moresby, 1873).
5. Pearson's son, Olandi, by Mapu from Poruma (Coconut Island), is the ancestor of the central island Pearson family, though not the Hopevale Pearson family (Noel Pearson, pers. comm., 1996). Pearson arrived in Torres Strait in c.1870. He owned and captained a schooner, *Pacific*, and set up his first station on Poruma in c.1873, where he fished bêche-de-mer, then pearlshell, then turtleshell with the help of local crew (Anon., 1897). He was by all accounts a fair man, generous to his workers and their families. Pearson managed the Mabuyag station for many years for its absentee owner, John Bell of Sydney and is almost certain to have had a financial interest. He later became the proprietor of the Royal Hotel on Thursday Island but continued to run boats during the 1890s. Pearson was one signatory of a petition by boat owners to Government Resident, Tl, addressed to the Legislative Assembly re *Bêche de Mer Fisheries Act*, dated 7 July 1893 (no boats or men listed).

Panay is a small hilly point on the northeast side of Mabuyag with a stone landing jetty about two kilometres from the village. It was traditionally the territory of the Dugong-Crocodile clan, which had its *kod* (men's ceremonial ground) nearby at Dabangay, which faces the extensive reef feeding grounds of the dugong (Haddon, 1935: 59). The *kod* structure was pulled down in early March 1918 (Done, 1915-1926: 49-50).
6. This may be the German-born Albert Collis, who managed John Merriman's station on Mabuyag in the late 1870s and Joseph Hasting's pearl shelling station on Gialag (Friday Island) in the early 1880s before setting up his own station on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) in the 1890s.
7. Ware managed the Merrimans' station from the beginning of the 1873 season until at least early 1875 (Beddome, 1874; Aplin, 1875a; Powell *et al.*, 1871-1876, entries for 10 June 1873, 8 July 1873, 26 August 1873).
8. Bell had 'a handsome tombstone' erected for Owens, which Strachan (1888: 14) viewed in 1884.
9. He also found two of the crew of the *Neva* who had just returned from the Fly River after an expedition by the Italian naturalist and explorer, Luigi Maria D'Albertis (Chester, 1878). For an account of the expedition, see D'Albertis (1880).
10. This was accomplished by ministerial directive rather than legislation (Sheehan, 1987: 35).
11. The other islands for which leases were granted were Palilag (Goods Island), Keriri (Hammond Island), Naghir (Mt Ernest Island) and Erub (Darnley Island) (Chester, 1882c).
12. Missionary letters echo these concerns: 'native women and a good supply of gin, at a pearlshelling station, are often made the bait with which to catch natives for diving, and I know that women and girls are sometimes obtained by foul means' (McFarlane, 1882b).

13. Christopher Scanlan was born c.1862 at Upolu, Samoa, the son of Jeremiah Scanlan, an Irish or Scottish timber merchant, and Faakaei from Samoa. After the death of his first wife, Nancy, he married Tina Taum Joe from Mabuyag and they had at least two children before his death at Erub (Darnley Island) in 1909 of malaria. Can Can may be his countryman, the son of Fuamatu and Mahey, born in c.1861, who died of lung disease in 1890 and is buried at Somerset, Cape York.
14. The three are tentatively identified from Rivers' Tables 4B, 4 and 9A in Haddon (1904) as, respectively: Dubu, born in the 1850s, son of Banai of the Crocodile clan and Uruba; Mabua, clan leader of Wagadagam and Mabuyag's first Anglican churchwarden, born in the 1850s, son of Aki of the Crocodile, Snake, Blenny and Suckerfish clans and Tama; and Karum (also known as Wame or Captain Joe), born in the 1860s, son of Iwau of the Cassowary, Dugong and Snake clans and his wife, Panay. All three had links with the LMS: Dubu's brother, Magala, became an LMS missionary; Mabua became an LMS deacon and Anglican churchwarden; Karum was expelled from his training for the LMS ministry. Karum's oldest child, Tina Taum, became Chris Scanlan's second wife in 1907 and married another Samoan diver, John Bourne, in 1909; her third marriage in 1920 was to the Solomon Islander, Jimmy Toto. Two of her children by Scanlan, Caroline and Michael, signed 'Bourne'.
15. Garrick Hitchcock (pers. comm., 2011) points out that the well is actually concrete-lined.
16. By mid-February 1906, the 'company boat' system had purchased 17 boats for nine island communities, representing a capital value of about £2,500, with new applications from all the others except Dauan (Annual Report, 1905: 29).
17. The Chief Protector did not recommend granting the concession (Howard, 1913).
18. On a visit to Mabuyag in about May 1914, the Home Secretary, the Hon. John George Appel, urged the men to sign on for six months or so, 'pointing out that it would give them some capital and also the experience to manage their own boats' (Anon., 1914).
19. In 1926 Jimmy [probably Luffman] and Williemauma [Misi] were crew members on the *Dinton* (Seamen's Discharge Register, 1926).
20. The Crown Solicitor's legal opinion is outlined in Bleakley (1921): 'this could only be done by proclaiming the grounds in question a prohibited area under Section 13 of the P.S. and B.de M. F. Acts of 1891 and then under Section 16 of the same Acts as extended by Section 4 of the 1913 Act granting a lease of outlying reefs or banks but this would only be valid in so far as it related to land within the three mile limit of the coast of Queensland or of one of the islands included in the area defined in the *Queensland Coast Islands Act of 1879*'.
21. Crews from the company boats, *Mabuiag*, *Uropi* (Min captain) and *Jimmy* (Jimmy Luffman captain) signed the petition. The *Mabuiag* and the *Uropi* were slipped for repairs the following year (1926) and the *Uropi* was rebuilt as a new boat (Annual Report, 1926: 5).
22. AIB became a corporation established by the *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1939* and then a semi-government corporation, the Islander Board of Industry and Service (IBIS).
23. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the greater institutionalization of the marine industries during the late 1920s, which prompted the department to send the company boats down the Great Barrier Reef with consequences for Islander society, politics and home life.
24. *Panton* and *Dulcia* belonged to Wyben Pearlring Co.
25. I thank Nonie Sharp for making her notes and files on the strike available to me. The events leading to the strike are more complex than is generally known, with the role played by the then Anglican bishop, for example, examined by Wetherell (2004).
26. After criticism of his Torres Strait administration, McLean was transferred in 1936 to the position of warden in Gladstone.
27. By contrast, 147 Islanders were employed on 'master' boats.
28. 'Try-diver' is the usual term for a 'trial' or 'apprentice' diver, who is being trained by an experienced diver, often a relative, and being 'tried' or 'trilled' to see whether he is suitable for such a dangerous and skilled occupation. John de Burgh Norman (pers. comm., 2012) tells me that training began in clear shallow water with an experienced diver watching and, as the try-diver proved himself, he progressed to deeper waters.
29. George (1996), who managed the Packe Island pearl culture farm during the early 1960s, provides an insider's view of the workings of the industry and its broader political and economic context. Ohshima

(1988) discusses in detail the Torres Strait cultured pearl industry from 1960 to 1979 and its cultural and economic impact on the Islanders, including the many who worked at Kuri Bay.

30. *Kestrel* belonged to Wanetta Pearlring Co.
31. The Yam Islander, Elap Price, was then living on Mabuyag, having married Penina Luffman, daughter of Luffman, in 1924. After the war he took his family to live at St Paul's Mission, Mua.
32. This vessel was later sold for £475 to the Mosby Brothers firm at Masig and renamed the *Nancy* (Foote, 1945).
33. It was pointed out by a reviewer that Edmonds Lechemere Brown and Walter David Taylor Powell were the coxswains during the timespan of the log. The citation here conforms to the library's bibliographic entry.